EVERY WEEK

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Western Story Magazine

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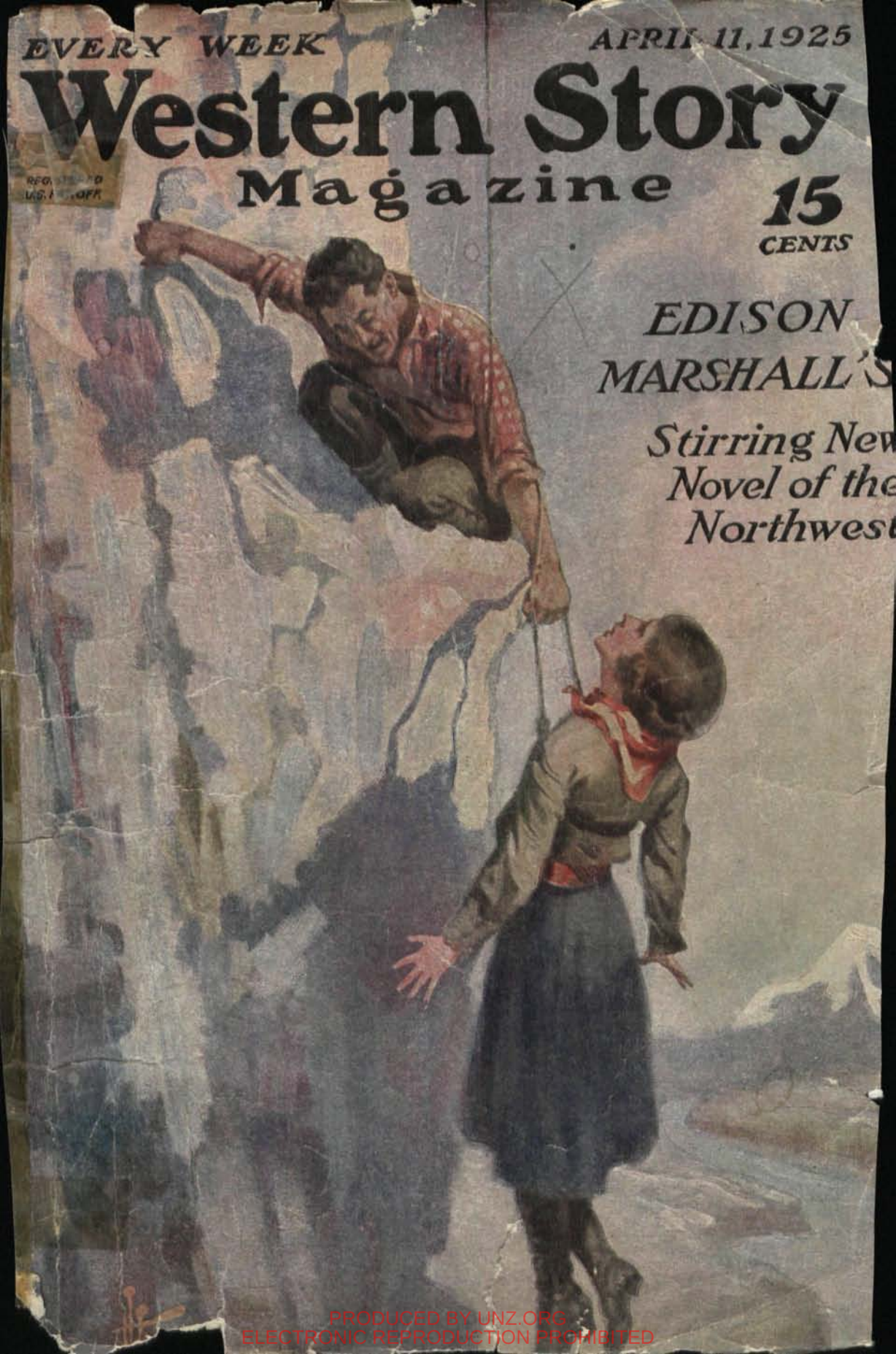

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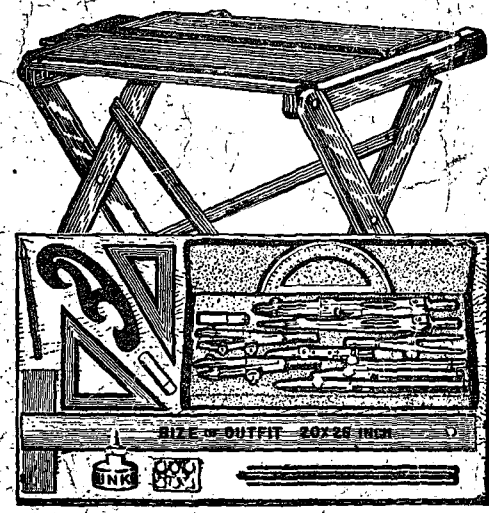

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LII APRIL 11, 1925 No. 2

Great White Wizard

By Edison Marshall

CHAPTER I.

DANGLING IN MID-AIR.

TO Davis, the director, the thrilling scene before him was simply the day's work. It was to be done, and done well; but patient and realistic detail rather than vision was the secret of his success. To Carlo Modesto, the leading man, it was "hokum" of the most degrading sort. He liked drawing-room parts and problem plays—he preferred a tail-coat to the flamboyant mounted police uniform he was now wearing. To Edith Quentin, whose face was better known than many a queen's, it was a perfect holiday, the most exquisite of make-believe, a childhood dream come true—her part exactly suited her—romance, color, adventure. She not only played it, but lived it—and perhaps that is why she "stole the picture!

Always a satisfactory actress, to-day Edith was at her best. Perhaps the fact that she was playing opposite Carlo wakened an added warmth in her; and particularly she was sensitive to the "location." Davis had achieved and carried out an ambitious plan—he had brought his company two hundred miles into the Yukon, five miles beyond the ultimate end of steel. Playing her part, she could look up to the ranges and breathe the piney balsam of the North woods in which the play was laid.

Her business to-day was particularly stirring. According to directions, she

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began to climb slowly up the almost precipitous wall of a gorge. Now the camera recalled her beauty with a "close-up"—her childish mouth almost near enough to kiss, her hair to touch, her lashes wet with tears. Somewhere, some time, Edith's people had lived by a warm sea. The pigment of her eyes had darkened to withstand the lances of a too-ardent sun; they were not brown, but an unfamiliar deep blue, as of a warm sea itself. An olive tint to her skin, a decided duskiness of shadows in her hair, and the significant warmth and tenderness of her beauty all told of the same heritage—the cold Nordic was banished in her. Perhaps one of the secrets of her popularity was the dreams she invoked—of romantic kingdoms, of moonlight on still waters, of castles in Spain. Now the camera man watched her without disillusionment, sharing the play with her.

She climbed higher, and to the camera it looked as if she were close to exhaustion. Once she raised her lovely arms, as if in despair, and once her hand seemed almost to miss its hold. She originated this bit, and Davis was delighted.

At last she clung within [illegible] feet of the top, but the sheer wall of the cliff would not permit her to go on. [illegible]at luck it was that her lover, the [illegible]s-man hero, spied her from the [illegible]nk!

Quick with the rope, [illegible] The climb was too much for her, and she's fainting! Down came the serpent of the lariat, and just as she wavered and fell, the loop dropped over her shoulders. Then, with the end of the rope fastened to a tree trunk on the brink, she swung in the empty air.

Most of this was only too real. Its particular thrill lay in the closeness of the photography which precluded working with a dummy. Nor was it an extra, the life of whom was of no great importance to the public at large, who struggled on the precipitous wall. Edith was doing her own stuff, and she did it with a spirit and sincerity that went a long way to explain her success in her chosen field.

Up to this point the scene had been a huge success. The camera, located on a shelf on the opposite of the gorge, had recorded it in every convincing detail—failing only to show a minor break in the action between the time the rope dropped down and that in which the heroine reeled from the cliff, a pause that permitted her to loop the rope with some care under her arms. At the precise moment that romance gave way to reality, Edith was swinging fairly comfortably above some ninety feet of sheer space, waiting for some of the men to haul her up.

"Haul away, boys," a man's voice directed.

Due to some acoustical peculiarity of the rock, the sound reached her but faintly, as if from a great distance, and it seemed to waken her to a new realization of her position. She was suddenly assailed by a queer sense of intense loneliness. She was all alone between the sky and the earth, a dangling mite like that very symbol of solitude, a spider on its silver thread.

Edith Quentin had never been given to nerves. This was a fact in connection with the utter lack of self-consciousness that made her a successful actress. It would be quite unlike her to give way to imaginary fears. Yet now the atmosphere of the gorge itself seemed to fasten on her like a great weight that would rend the rope and let her fall. The rocks were gray, grim, and frowning—not picture rocks, convincing on the outside but showing cardboard within. The yawning distance below was not a mere camera trick, and huge boulders, strewn on the gorge floor, returned grimly the glance she gave them from her swing.

She had played with them, but they were not playing with her. Millions

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over the broad land might admire her acting, but it was nothing to the gray crags that watched so grimly now. An actress cannot play if those who watch her do not enter in. The delusion is instantly shattered, and she is left as in a nightmare, a minute and pitiable figure prancing grotesquely on the stage. The stone was a cold audience, and something quite like cold fastened on her heart. She was an intruder, with her make-believe, into a silent and fateful company that was without pity for youthful folly.

With such thoughts haunting her, it was inevitable that she should begin to test with care the actual facts of her position. Her life literally hung by a thread—a rope scarcely as large as her little finger. Why had she trusted it? She knew why—because this was in the day's work. To supply a strong rope had been the business of the property man, and she had not concerned herself about it. If it should break, the play would end quickly enough! The audience, the gray spectators in the gorge below, would see that there could be no curtain call. It was as if the world, rather than herself, dangled from a rope. If it parted, she might go on, how and where she did not know, but the world on which her feet had walked, the wheel of comprehension of which she had been the hub, would cease to be.

She caught herself with a mental shudder. What outer stimuli had wakened these eerie fancies? Not just the frowning aspect of crags among which she had acted many times before! Something, somewhere had gone wrong. This she had sensed subconsciously, or the strained silence, or perhaps the feel of quaking hands on her rope, conveyed the knowledge to her. And now her vague dismay was blown away by a cold wind of terror.

No poetic imagery, dwelling in her deft and creative brain, was concerned in this error now. A savage could feel it as acutely as she, or perhaps a beast: it was the fear of dying. She glanced up, seeking the source of the danger which, devastating though it was, she did not yet understand, and at first she only saw the assistant director, leaning far over the cliff edge and peering down at her. His face was chalk white, and his eyes were like colored disks under his brows. Then she saw that he was not looking at her, but at a point a few feet over her head, where her rope passed over a small projecting ledge and went out of sight. All that she saw when she followed his gaze was a dangling bit of string—a mere raveling, yet important in its way.

The situation was now quite clear. The rope was all but worn in two. The miniature ledge over which it had passed was sharp as a flint, as is often seen in cliffs of shale; and the weight of her body, swinging below, had rubbed and ground the hemp against its knife-edge so that at the first tug the men had given to haul her up, most of the fiber had severed. The least pressure more from either direction would certainly part the remainder of the strands.

"Stay still and don't swing!" a hoarse voice screamed down at her. "We'll get you in a minute."

She could not obey him, and what was worse, she could not believe him. Among Edith's gifts was the cool-headed ability to take stock of a situation, and the stock of this one was low. No other rope was in reach; a ruthless and crystal-clear memory recalled hearing the property man say so, when one was wanted for another scene. Time longer than a minute would be required to procure another rope from camp. In the meantime her body continued to sway, ever so slightly, in the swing, and the sharp shale bit into the hemp. Dizzy, sick, but with the vague beginnings of reconciliation, she waited for the plunge.

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On the brink above were two men, each with a different reaction to the cliff disaster. One of them, the assistant director, was clutching a tree with one hand and leaning far out over the precipice. The other, a property man, stood in a queer position of listening. The former was starkly pale, and curiously enough, the latter almost purple from apoplectic congestion. One thing, however, they had in common: a distinct air of anticipation. The suspense could certainly last but a moment more.

They were merely waiting—one to see, and the other, possessing the auditory type of mind, to hear—and really, they knew of nothing else they could do. Two men were running back to camp, as fast as they could for another rope. One of the camera men was scrambling down the less precipitious decline on the opposite side, but what he would do when he reached the bottom neither himself nor the two on the cliff top had the least idea.

This looked like an open-and-shut proposition. It was just one of those things that happen—usually in some distant place and read of in the papers, but once in a long time, close at hand. That any person could be of different mind did not occur to them until they saw a third man, one who had been watching the picture-taking from a short distance, come leaping past them to the brink.

This man moved with a swiftness that their bewildered minds could hardly follow. The assistant director had hunted wild game, a little—during picture-taking trips into the woods—and the swift likeness flashed into the cinema of his mind of a fleeing deer, skimming over rough country. There was the same explosive energy, and, at once, a dumfounded quantity of distance covered. He did not know it; but this wolfish celerity seen in the man was famous aforetime. The potentialities had been born in him, a conspicuous gift, but years in the wolf's own trails had developed it to perfection.

It was a thrilling thing to see. His coat seemed to fly from his body, and his shoes, the laces broken and the hooks riped out, had been thrust off already. In one motion more he swung over the edge of the cliff and began to lower himself down its abrupt face.

This had a suicidal look. To all appearance the precipice was sheer, an unbroken wall offering no suggestion of a foothold. Yet the assistant director, horror-stricken, saw him clutch and hang on as if his fingers had scratched into the rock, and his companion, who listened, heard no immediate pop of a falling weight. Perhaps the stranger knew his stuff—some one had said so, the night he was hired. His face showed quite plain beside the gray cliff, and it was hardly that of a maniac, driven from reason by some nerve-breaking crisis and bent on self-destruction.

For a moment the assistant director almost forget the larger aspects of the scene to wonder at the stranger's face. The Stranger from Hell—this was what they called him—and in some queer, obscure way the name was fitting. Only one who had followed the devil through the fire could look like this—casual, almost amused, faintly sardonic. His glance was quiet, almost dull.

He seemed to know just what he was doing, and wasn't especially interested. Meanwhile, he was taking the most breath-taking chances—dropping from shelf to shelf, clinging to the merest crack in the rock, groping with his stockinged feet for minute ledges hardly perceptible on the vertical wall. To climb this precipice would have been a difficult mountaineering feat; to descend it merely a deadly one. Of course he was trained in mountain work, having followed the wild sheep bands

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over slide rock and rampart; and, barring accidents, he allowed a fair chance for success. A fair chance was all he asked for, such as until now he had always played, and won.

Of course he did not attempt any great swiftness. Once he looked up and smiled, as if in secret and unconscious amusement, at the assistant director's absorbed expression. Just the same the gray space of rock between widened as if by long strides.

He met the girl's eyes, looking up at him and brimming with hope, and he began to talk to her as he worked down. His deep voice was careless and casual, and it brightened her long before her scattered faculties could grasp his words.

"Don't worry. I'll either save you, or I won't, and your worrying will be over in either case. Try not to be frightened. You can't hang so limp if you're frightened, and every motion makes more wear on the rope. Oh! pretty near went then, myself. Treacherous, these cliffs. How the sheep can scamper over them I don't see. I'll be down in a minute."

She regarded him with slowly widening eyes. Her vision seemed to clear. Some of the fear mist swept out of her mind, and the beginnings of a signal clarity of thought took its place. Perhaps she would lose it soon, but now everything seemed simple and clear. Profound problems whose burdens she had but glimpsed became as sums for children, were answered and left her free. She wondered if this were a kind of introduction to death.

"How's your nerve?" he asked her.

At this question, so frankly asked, she emerged into his mood. She almost sobbed with relief. This was not because she felt safe—rescue was still no more than a sporting chance—but simply because her point of view toward the danger was changed. She could take her chance with him now, and meet the devil on his own ground. Winning or losing seemed not so important—the main thing was the playing of the game. She felt strong, light, and free.

Somehow this man's personality took hold of her and she was sharing in his calloused attitude toward life. The moon might vanish, soon, and this man sink once more out of her level; but for the moment they were fellow adventurers. As if this valiancy had lain innate in her, waiting to be wakened, she found herself answering him in her own vein.

"My nerve's all right, thanks," she answered.

"Good. Excuse me for asking." He worked down a difficult place and now was almost beside her. "I wanted to be sure you wouldn't clutch me, which would put us both out, mighty quick. I'm hanging by my eyebrows. Now, if I can take a little pressure off that rope——"

Clinging to the cliff with one hand he slowly worked the other between the ledge and the frayed strands of her rope. For the first time she realized his main intent: to hold it from the cutting edge and take the strain upon his arm. His hand, reaching around, grasped the lariat below its worn place and helped to relieve the strain upon it. Thus he hoped to sustain her until another rope could be dropped from above.

"You're pretty brave," she told him simply.

"A little, but not much. It depends on what you mean by brave." He tried to strengthen his precarious hold on the rock. "It's pleasant to have you think so."

"I know so. Will it hurt our chances to talk?"

"Not at all. I rather wish you would. We've got quite a few minutes to dangle. I doubt if these men can bring a rope short of five minutes. It'll help to pass the time."

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"You can't hang on—for five minutes." She spoke incredulously, yet not with any great terror. That he could stand the strain on his arm and fingers, perched as he was on the precipice, for more than a minute or two seemed quite beyond her power or her hope to believe. "You're risking your life every second you stand there."

"Life's not worth very much, thanks. I'd probably get along just as well without it—it's sort of in the way, at times. A moment like this calls for frankness."

"Yes." Her voice lowered. "Perhaps our last moment."

"I shouldn't wonder. We're apt to take a bump any second now. I'm not overly steady."

"It's a pity people have to wait for a time like this, to be themselves. Yet I wonder if I'm talking this way, or just dreaming it. Why are you doing this for me, taking this chance? I wouldn't have climbed down here for you."

"You'd be mighty foolish if you did. I'm nothing to you. Lord, we're on absolutely different planes."

"And I'm nothing to you, either."

"No, not much. Nothing at all until now—oh, yes, maybe a little something, because of a matter I can't explain, even here. I didn't crawl down here because you are you—but after seeing the good sport you are, I'm glad I attempted it. Saving you seems tremendously important now—much more than I imagined. Please don't ascribe it to nobility in me. I can't bear to pass off as noble. The truth is, I'm infernally selfish, and up till now I've been working for selfish reasons, more than for you. It's just tests like this that—— Lord, I hope I don't get solemn!"

"It would seem more conventional to get solemn. Doesn't it seem queer to be talking like this—in this common way——"

"It ought to, but it doesn't. Maybe it's our last chance to talk, and we'd better make the most of it. Neither of us can imagine where we may be two seconds from now. How's your rope? Probably mighty uncomfortable."

"Not so bad. But your wrist—and your arm getting ground into that sharp edge—oh, I didn't realize——"

"It hurts like the devil, to be frank. Let's talk some more, to take my mind off of it. It's always a good way out, you know—to do one thing to take your mind off something else."

"You're suffering—I can see it in your face. Pull your arm out. I'll take a chance."

"Couldn't think of it. There—I've tightened my hold a little more. That rope would cut through in less than a minute."

"You think—it's going to break anyway?" She looked at him out of a sudden mist of tears. "I'm getting afraid again——"

"Don't be. I'll see you through."

"You mean——".

"Save you if I can. That strand may hold. If not—I go with you."

She gasped, trying to breathe. "You mean—you'd follow me?"

"Not one half second behind." The man smiled, as if to reassure her—a perfectly casual, slightly sardonic smile she was beginning to know.

Extraordinary though this statement was, she could not doubt it. She had believed many lies, and of much she was disillusioned, yet she knew that this pale man beside her told only the truth. It simply would not be worth his while to lie. "Why?" she whispered.

"Very simple reason. A gentleman couldn't think of letting a lady tackle something scarey alone, when he's standing by with nothing particular to do. Of course you'd never know what hit you, but on the other side—there might be quite a journey. Quite a rush through wind and space that you'd hate

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to take by yourself—wind and space and darkness, likely enough. Wouldn't it be convenient to have some one along—just a half second behind—to help keep up the good old nerve?"

Once more she rallied under the cold ministry of his voice. "It would be—most convenient." She was stark pale, but her tone was once more steady and sure. "Are you quite sure—that you haven't something else to do?"

If she had paused to reflect she could scarcely have believed that these words were actually hers. As it was, they seemed quite natural and fitted to the occasion. The sudden, absolute divorcement of self-consciousness had revealed her in a new rôle, all the more amazing because it was instinctive. It was like the emerging of a gorgeous moth from a drab cocoon.

"I'm quite sure. It would be an enterprising adventure. The rope had better come soon. I've got a symptom."

Edith grew hot and cold by turns, and now sharp horror leaped and grasped her again. "Oh, what——"

"A queer tingling in my arms. Quite a disagreeable sensation. If I should spill, don't snatch for me."

"Turn about's fair play. I'd go to—just as you said *you* would——"

Their eyes met, and he shook his head. "That's just hysteria. It's hardly playing the game, either." For all she could tell, his commonplace tone did not falter. "You have a long way to go—a lover—and heaven knows what all, and it would be the devil for everybody if anything should happen to you. You're not breaking down, are you? Flying off a little?"

"No." Then, with a smile: "The old nerve is still cold and gay."

"Excellent. I'm a fool, but I want your promise. You wouldn't think—of doing what you said?"

"No. I'll hang on till the rope breaks. I was just talking, I guess. I'm not that much of a sport."

"Or that much of a fool! That's my case. Those men are infernally slow. I hope you fire the lot——"

Though his manner and voice remained cool, she now got the impression that he was fighting really a desperate battle. He had a drawn look against which his smile looked fixed and hard, and his fingers were waxen white against the gray stone. His talk became sporadic; still not forced, but somewhat strained, crisp, and hushed. The subject was almost exhausted, anyway. The case had got down to a simple matter of waiting for the outcome of the race.

The seconds trudged by as if in a slow death march. The queer pallor in Roy's fingers spread down into his hands. Presently he signaled to her by an ounce of additional upholding pressure on her rope.

She was not surprised to find him regarding her with his mirthless, mocking smile. This was quite in character. The race was run, and a rope coil from the brink above came twitching down beside her.

Roy directed her how to drop it over her body, at the same time keeping a tight hold on it in case the frayed strands that had held so long should part before she was secured. In a moment she was hanging free and safe, the man's wracked arm saving the life line from any wear against the ledge.

"Yell to 'em to haul you up, and then drop it down for me," he told her finally. "I'll keep you out till you get past the ledge."

She answered with a sudden and most significant glitter in her wide eyes. In contrast with her pallor the effect was really startling. "Can't you catch the rope and hold on?"

"Easily, but that rope wasn't built for two. It's not much thicker than a cod line. I don't believe it would be quite safe."

"Are you willing to chance it?"

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"Oh, quite——"

"Then get on. We'll see it through together. I won't go up alone."

Perhaps because of some inner understanding between one brave soul and another, probably because he was too tired to disobey, Roy grasped the rope; and from his higher position it was easy to hold it off by means of his feet from the slashing ledge.

"Are you ready?" he asked, with an almost forgotten gayety.

"All ready."

"Then press the button. We're going up."

CHAPTER II.

"THE STRANGER" AGAIN.

AS soon as Edith had rested, she sent for her rescuer with the idea of giving him more formal thanks, only to learn that he could not be found. Little could she find out about him. He had appeared that morning, and inquired for Carlo Modesto, her fiancée and leading man of the company, had failed to find him, and after sharing the cliff scene with her, had gone back to the mining camp from which he had come, a distance of about five miles from "location." He had no name that men knew, and as it is etiquette in the North, no questions were asked.

"I want you to go with me into the town and find him," Edith told Carlo. "I must thank him, and besides—I think you'll be interested in talking to him. I believe he is just the man to double for you in some of your snow scenes."

Carlo chilled her enthusiasm. "I don't see how you can presume that he can fill such an important position."

"Well, you must have some one. Clark isn't going to be well enough to do the things. And you know, I won't let you attempt them yourself."

"Not only you." A proud look crept over Carlo's extraordinarily handsome face. "My public won't let me, either. It's foolish—dozens of actors, I suppose, could do my work as well as I can, but these foolish people keep writing me not to take risks. They are kind enough to want my art preserved."

"I want *you* preserved—I'm not worrying about your art." Edith was annoyingly practical at times. "Carlo, I think this stranger is just the man you want. I assure you he won't mind taking risks. He is just about your build, and with a little make-up, can pass for you, even with fairly close photography. The fact is, that he resembles you quite a little, and that isn't imagination, either." She laughed happily. "Perhaps that is why I took to him so readily."

They drove one of the company cars down an old mining road into the camp—the new diggings that had attracted men from all over the North. The townspeople recognized them at once, as always, and crowded about them as they dismounted from their automobile. Edith smiled at them, but Carlo was faintly contemptuous.

It was said of him that he never was more distinguished than at a time like this, when humble people pressed upon him and gaped at him. It was his manner now, that of almost unconscious superiority, of aristocratic aloofness, for which he was actually famous. This was the trick—in him evidently an inborn trait—that had brought him first to the director's attention, that had started him out in his meteoric career to arrive overnight as a fixed star of first magnitude, and that now distinguished all his great rôles. Romantic girls, the world over, adored him for it; and famous men conceded him their respect. No doubt Carlo Modesto was, to the manner born, a scion of an ancient noble Castillian house, just as the press agents told. He moved through the crowd quite as if it were not there, and it parted before him.

To the people he was not in the least disappointing, but rather exceeded their

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ideals of him gained from the screen. His Latin features were marvelously regular, his glossy black head held high. Edith was a tall girl, strong as a doe, yet Carlo's great frame made her look slight. No wonder she glowed at the admiration paid his signally graceful and attractive figure.

They were not to encounter Edith's rescuer at once. A minor adventure found them first. Avoiding the little crowd they had wandered into a side street lined by log huts, and she glanced up to see an old Indian woman confronting her on the sidewalk. The squaw might have been sixty, and she might have been a hundred and ten—certainly more winters had come and gone than her primitive mathematics could reckon. Her face suggested an ancient scroll on which a racial history had been written—of wars, famines, triumphs, of old orders changing and giving way to new. To a casual eye she was merely ugly and grotesque; but an artist would have found a moving theme in the time-scarred countenance and the stooped, shapeless, and quite impassive form.

The two young people paused, and the squaw regarded them with inscrutable eyes. Even now, before she had spoken, these eyes fascinated Edith. She could imagine them in the visage of an idol older than a race, a god of ruthless destiny all-seeing and all-knowing. It was somehow significant that she could meet that fateful gaze without inner discomfort. Perhaps because he had less imagination, possibly for stranger reasons too deep for even Edith to plumb, Carlo chose to answer with his superior and contemptuous smile. Very gravely the woman raised her arm and pointed a lean finger.

"Heap big medicine," she pronounced. She seemed to be pointing at Carlo's shoulder, and her tone was so flat and dull that it had a kind of inverse eloquence, hard to describe. The finger shook perceptibly. Then, her voice trailing off: "The sign, the sign!"

In an instant Edith saw what the sign was—a campaign button on Carlo's lapel—simply a small metal figure of an elephant, the symbol of one of the great political parties of the presidential election. Carlo looked down at the button and turned to a townsman.

"What does the old woman want?" he asked impatiently. "Is she crazy?"

The stranger grinned, but his eyes betrayed his eager interest. "Most people think so. But go ahead, and let her talk. If she's going right, she'll give you an earful."

"I wouldn't understand her anyway, and I don't believe I want to be bothered. Tell her to move on."

"Go on and leave her, if you don't want to listen to her. Just the same—you're missing something mighty interesting. She's kind of a seer—rather unusual in the Indians—and we people here put quite a little faith in her. It isn't often we can get her to talk; and it's just that button you are wearing that's set her off."

"I didn't know your aborigines went in for politics!"

"They don't. It's the elephant that caught her eye. She comes from Yonderland—way over to the East—and the elephant is a sacred symbol with her people. She's beckoning you to go with her, and when she looks like that, she's got something to say. If I were you, I'd follow her."

Carlo was of other mind. His dignity was dear to him, and he did not propose to lose it by such an asinine performance as the stranger suggested. Edith, however, had no great amount of dignity to lose.

"Don't be prissy," she whispered. And then, clutching her companion's arm, she guided him with some firmness across the street and in the direction the old woman had gone.

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She encouraged them no further, but trudged along with bent head. Presently she turned into a small cabin off the road, and with mounting curiosity, they followed through the open door. In the heavy shadows where she sat, the only brightness was the half-mad shine in her prophetic eyes.

"You very bold man," she told Carlo at last. He was standing before her now, and her gaze locked on his face. "Maybe you just fool. Maybe not know."

"Don't know what?"

"Wear his picture—on coat!" She pointed again at the metal button. "Even medicine man, he no dare do that. You fall soon. Him—him knock you down, kneel with big knees till you mash flat. You great and strong now, but elephant—him strong as mountain. Strong as blizzard. Mighty as great river *hiyou* over there." She jerked with her thumb toward the east.

"What river can she mean?" Edith whispered. "Not the Yukon—*hiyou* means 'far,' Davis said—the Yukon is right here. Can she mean the Mackenzie?" Then to the squaw: "Who you mean by 'him?'"

"You not know. *Him* the devil-god!' One taloned hand went to her eyes and covered them. *"The elephant! The elephant!"*

Neither of the two whites could escape the pressure of that moment. Their armor of sophistication which, like all men, they had put on to shield them from the numbo jumbo of their jungle fancies, was powerless against the black magic of this voice. It was not only hushed, stricken, and humble—it was a veritable croak of despair; not merely the awed invocation of a god of terror, but a wail of pity from his anger at the mentioning of his name.

The woman quaked in her chair, but presently went on in a calmer voice. "I tell you," she muttered, nodding. "I talk English good. The elephant—he god everywhere, but special *hiyou* god over there." Again she indicated the east.

"This is a joke," Carlo whispered as the speaker paused. "What do these people know about elephants—they couldn't have ever seen one."

Edith indicated silence, and the droning voice commenced again. "God, him the Elephant, and so he know everything. He never forget, not one thing. You think he will forget? You wait and see—he know—sometime he show you. Every good thing you do—he remember that—maybe some time pay you back. Every bad thing—he remember that, too. You no hide nothing from him. You throw rock in the water?"

"What do you mean?"

"You throw rock, ripples begin to go. Get bigger and bigger. Rock goes out of sight, but ripples bigger all the time. When you do evil, same you throw rock in water, and ripples start—bigger all the time. Elephant god—he make ripples. You think he forget—then you see ripples growing, growing—you know he remember."

Her tone became prophetic. "The Elephant—he make you come up here. You soon see ripples growing—growing. Soon you meet a man. A dark man——"

"The usual brunette gentleman!" Carlo commented. "This fortune-telling is running true to form after all."

"Two cones on the same tree. Two birds in the same nest. You throw stone, but ripples show where it goes. You throw other stone to break up ripples, only make more, growing—growing. You die, him die, she die—ripples *don't* die. I come of the death people, and I tell truth."

The prophetic voice died away. Carlo passed his hand before his eyes as if wakened from sleep. Then, with sudden energy, he whirled upon Edith. "I've listened to all this trash I'm going to!" he stormed.

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She was startled by the outburst, not so much at its loud sound in the hushed room, but by the beginnings of anger in this man so famous for his poise.

"You can stay here long as you like," he went on, "but I'm going out. I was a fool for coming."

He ran out through the open doorway, and, pausing only to cross the woman's trembling hand with silver, Edith followed.

It proved easy to return to her everyday world and shake off the woman's spell. Davis, the director, accompanied by two gold seekers, were waiting for the stars in the sunlit road, and he simply bustled with business.

"Edith, I've got track of the fellow you told me to look up," he began cheerfully, in his usual explosive manner. "Carlo, I believe I've found your double—I mean, some one to double for you in those snow scenes. I've been talking to these men about that stranger fellow, and they say you look like two birds out of the same nest." He turned to his companions. "Is this chap blond or brunette?"

"He's dark," one of them answered.

As they hurried off to see about him, they were followed by a droning voice from within the cabin—a voice that droned and grew fainter and finally became one with the silence. "Ripples, ripples," it was saying. "Ripples growing—growing."

"I'm sure he'll be glad to take the job," one of the townsmen was saying, "and welcome the change from digging in that fizzle claim of his. He's a reckless devil, and he'll try anything—once. He was pretty famous for some of his exploits in the Seward Peninsula country, fifteen hundred miles from here—around Nome."

At that instant a queer thing happened, visible only to Edith. Save that she kept her eyes on him, for reasons of her own, she would not have seen it either. Carlo was perceptibly startled. He made no sudden motions, discernible to a casual glance—indeed, his start took the form of a sudden suspension of motion. His eyes remained open without winking for a single second longer than usual, to give the effect of a brief stare; his hands stopped moving, and his lips hung apart for the time of a breath.

"Nome?" he asked.

No special inflection was on the word. His voice was a trained instrument; only Edith was surprised at the interruption.

"There are fellows here who have come a longer way than that," the man explained. "There's an old saying that if you want to find anybody in the North, just go into the newest gold camp. He did some things over there—shooting some rapids and so on—that caused a little talk. And he does resemble you somewhat. Of course he's not the distinguished-looking man that you are, if you'll excuse me saying it; he's a younger man, I think, but he looks older. He's been in the North only since the war, but he's learned his stuff, and after tackling some pretty hard games, without regard to consequences, he's learned how to handle still harder ones."

Carlo nodded, but did not speak. No flicker of an eyelash showed more than casual or business interest. No doubt this man was an actor. For all his reluctance to perform dangerous feats, Edith had not thrown away her love on a weakling; in more ways than Carlo Modesto was a man of parts.

"Here we are at his hotel," the man went on. "I'll get him, and you can talk to him yourself."

He turned to go, but Carlo restrained him. This was a rather sudden, emphatic movement that arrested his friends. "Don't bother," he remarked casually. "I really don't think he's the man I want."

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Davis turned in amazement. "You don't?"

"No. I'll look around a little myself. Maybe I'll hunt him up in the morning, and talk to him—but Davis—we don't want a crazy dare-devil getting killed on our hands. A fine story for the papers, wouldn't it be—some poor backwoodsman killed while doubling for me!"

"Oh, I didn't mean he is crazy," the townsman protested. "If you'd ask me, I'd say that something has happened, some time or other, that has made him quit caring about his life. That's common enough, up here."

"I'll want him, whether Mr. Modesto does or not," the director said. "What's got into you, Carlo?"

Edith was puzzled too. All the time she had known that Carlo possessed depths which she had not plumbed. One side of him was beyond her—ever in shadow no matter how she moved—and though she had hoped to reach it soon, it was never more inaccessible than now. Whatever the sudden burden that had been laid upon him, he had no intention of sharing it with her. His Latin eyes had strange enigmatic lights in his ashen countenance.

"I'll go with you and hunt him up," Carlo told the man; but before they could start, the stranger himself came through the door of the hotel into the street. The townsmen called him, and he walked gravely toward them.

He bowed to Edith—rather mockingly she thought—and now that he was beside Carlo, she compared the two men to see whether their resemblance was real or fancied. They suggested each other—that was all; essentially they were different types. Yet the stranger was an absorbing study in himself—a personality vivid, perhaps sinister, certainly new to her.

It was the wind, the yelling demon of the North, extremes of weather, and the glare of sunlit waters that made him so dark. In the beginning he was probably rather fair. It must have been war—the rude, wild, daily struggle with the raw forces of nature dominant still in the North—that made him so steely, so wolfish.

He was far less handsome than Carlo naturally, and his rough life had scarred him. Any likeness to him lay in the general cast of his features. She believed that his mouth had once been boyish, sensitive, and almost feminine, but now a droop at its corner gave him a sardonic, reckless look, borne out by the cold brilliance of his eyes—trained eyes, from long watchings, from eager peerings into dimness. They told of a soul lost and battered, at the same time hinting of a remnant of sardonic humor, a calloused amusement with life.

"We meet again," he said to Edith. So far he took no notice of Carlo.

"Under less exciting circumstances," Edith told him gravely. "I present Mr. Modesto."

The stranger turned easily. "I am very proud to make your acquaintance," he said, in a mocking tone she remembered. "It seems to me that your face is familiar—could we have possibly met before?"

"My face is familiar to a good many," Carlo replied. At such meetings he was known to hold his own with the best. "Perhaps you have seen my pictures."

"Several times. Besides—your face would naturally seem familiar." Then, after a short but rather startling pause, in which all motion everywhere was arrested: "if only for its resemblance to mine, with which I am much too well acquainted."

"You know me by reputation. And your name is——"

" 'Sir, my name is lost.' Isn't that the way it goes? I've forgotten most of the Shakespeare I ever knew."

"That's about the way it goes," Edith told him. This little drama was some-

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how her own, so she must take her part. "It was Edgar's speech in Lear—I can't remember the rest of it."

He bowed to her again, somewhat grandly and eloquently and a little bit pathetically, then turned at once to Carlo. "You'll excuse the nonsense, sir," he asked gravely. "I'm known here as The Stranger, and I sign my name Roy Stranger. You want to see me on business? I am entirely at your service."

"I'd like to. Can we go some place? I'd like to talk over what you can do, and the nature of the work I have in mind, and we can do it best by ourselves."

They turned toward the hotel, and though Edith watched them out of sight, their businesslike manner toward each other did not change. For none of the others had this conversation possessed more than casual interest. Yet she knew she was not deceived: she had witnessed the crossing of two long-divergent trails.

Carlo had been frightened—this she knew—but she could no longer share his fear. For all his sardonic smile, this stranger was no enemy; and she believed that instead of malignance, he had extended a most extraordinary welcome, repressed though it was, to the man who looked like him from another world. It was not only heart-felt, sincere, and abundant beyond her immediate grasp, but in her woman's wisdom it was something else, a quality which at first eluded her. Presently she knew—that somehow this youth's welcome was the most pathetic scene that in her play-world or her day-world she had ever beheld.

In the same breath she knew the quotation which a moment before she had been unable to recall:

> Know, my name is lost;
> By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit;
> Yet am I noble as the adversary
> I come to cope.

CHAPTER III.

CARLO TELLS A STRANGE TALE.

CARLO was silent regarding his conversation with Roy Stranger; and when the latter appeared on location, to double for Carlo, the relationships of the two men were perfectly ordinary and professional. Roy knew how to keep his place. Carlo, on the other hand, was adept at maintaining the proper distance between a star and an extra person.

Edith did not talk about him at first to Carlo, because the latter avoided the subject. Then, suddenly, he broached the matter in a way that left her gasping with surprise.

"Edith, I saw you talking on the lot with that Roy Stranger," he remarked, as they walked together one evening in late May. His patronizing tone was only too significant, yet she remained unwarned. "Granting his rather brave act a few days ago, I must remind you that you should keep your place a little better in front of me and my friends."

Her red mouth dropped open, then shut with a rather ominous click. "Carlo, do you realize what you're saying?" she demanded.

He refused to take warning from the sudden shine in her eyes, and her heightened color focusing into a bright red spot in each cheek, like rouge badly applied.

"I certainly do. You stop and speak to him just as if he were an equal, and show your interest in him to every one, and I even saw you walking across the lot with him. I don't want to seem officious, Edith, but this really doesn't look well. The whole world has its eyes on us all the time, and I tell you, that gives a person responsibility, and ought to make him keep to his standards. I often feel like being nice to an inferior, especially when he's a decent sort—just to show I appreciate his good points—but when I do grant him an ell,

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he takes a mile. While I don't want to appear ungracious, I must warn you to handle such people with gloves."

She eyed him quietly. "I don't think I want any warning," she told him gravely. "And I warn you that I don't take any too kindly to that sort of silliness, either. If it came from anybody else, Carlo, I'd laugh."

The beginnings of anger showed in his somber eyes. "You don't seem to appreciate my care of you," he complained. Then, rather darkly: "How do you know this man isn't a dangerous character?"

"I'd rather wait to see if he does anything desperate before I condemn him."

"What would you say if I told you that he *is* such a character, and that a terrible crime has been proved against him? I don't suppose you'd care to listen to that, either. It may surprise you, Edith, to hear that I already know something about this man you are so eager to defend."

"It wouldn't surprise me at all."

Again she saw that curious inertness in his eyes, giving the effect of a stare. "What do you mean?"

"I know you know him. I could tell that the first time we met. I've been waiting to have you tell me about him. It would be mighty disagreeable news to me that he has been guilty of real wickedness; he didn't seem that kind. If it's just somebody's telltale, I don't want to hear it."

"Unfortunately, it isn't. It is a matter of legal record."

"Oh, I can't believe it." She looked off a long time. "You have every right to warn me about a thing like that, Carlo. You should have told me in the first place, instead of that nonsense about maintaining our places. Carlo, just what is that man to you?"

Her companion's head turned slowly and evenly until his eyes met hers. He seemed to be studying her expression. "Why do you ask?"

"You knew him before. If I'm not mistaken, you knew him pretty well. You know what the men call him—Carlo's country cousin, because he looks something like you. Perhaps we'd make better headway if you told me the whole thing."

So he told her, eloquently regretting the necessity of exposing Roy. He explained that the man was not his cousin, but a distant relation on the Morino side; and in spite of the fact that he himself came of the Spanish aristocracy, the two had been fairly well acquainted for many years. The occasion of their late meeting was not really a strange coincidence, but more the effect of a cause. As part of the floating population of the North, Roy had naturally drifted to the newest gold camp.

"No doubt the poor beggar was glad to see me," Carlo remarked. "He feels that he owes me a most tremendous obligation. He really doesn't—I did what I did because it was my nature, and couldn't help it."

"So you *did* help him," the girl exulted. "That's my Carlo——"

"I regret to say that I forgot my obligation as an officer of the army of the United States to help out this boy I had known at home," he explained gravely. "You see, the thing occurred during the war. I was attached to the staff of the first army. Along toward the end of the war one of our secret-service men got track of a leak of information to the Germans, by which they had made a successful attack on a small hill in the Bois de Forge region, wiping out a company of our boys. The leak was soon traced down to a beautiful adventuress in Paris, Madame Burzet.

"Being attached to staff, I knew about the case, and like many others, I followed it with interest. She got away, somehow or other, but from various clews the officers soon learned

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that the man in the case, the soldier who had given her information, likely as a reward for her caresses, was an American whose last name was Moore.

"As soon as I heard that much, I put two and two together. This boyhood acquaintance of mine was named Moore—Roy Moore—and I remembered seeing him with Madame Burzet at a Parisian café about the time the treason occurred."

"How did you know it was she?"

"Because she was pointed out to me as a famous character. Well, in a few weeks more of investigation the full truth came out. Two days after the armistice, a letter was discovered in her former lodgings that identified the traitor as Roy Moore. He had even signed his name to it, like a fool, and told her his present location; and when the handwriting was compared, it was found to be identical with his. Of course he would be shot at once.

"The exposure was a great blow to me, Edith. Though I had little in common with the boy, I had known him fairly well, and the idea of seeing him put up and shot for what I suppose was boyish folly more than actual treason, was horrible to me. I had a lot of influence, so I got leave; and by looking up his records, soon located him on furlough in a French town just behind the lines.

"This was five days after the armistice. The war was over, but that wouldn't save Roy Moore. I told him that he had been found out, that there was a clear case against him, and that he was about to be arrested. Of course he would be executed—scores of lives had been lost through his treachery. I told him that for the sake of our old acquaintance, I would risk my commission and reputation by helping him get away."

"Did he admit his guilt?"

"No—I didn't expect him to. A criminal seldom does."

"I suppose running away implied it," the girl observed thoughtfully, "or did he stay and fight the case?"

"No, but at first he acted as if he wanted to. Probably it was just bluff. I advised him to go, because I knew there wasn't a chance for him, and I had thought up a plan to save his family the worst of the disgrace. That night he took off his sergeant's stripes and got himself into a burial crew, taking care of some of the dead at Bois de Forge. There were many dead in that region, in brushy corners of the woods, and weeks went by before they were all taken care of. On a body so multilated that it was past recognition, he attached his stripes and his own identification tags.

"Because he had been on furlough about a week, no one who knew him had seen him alive since the armistice, and when the body was finally registered, no one doubted that it was Roy Moore. They supposed that while on his way back to his company, he had been killed—in one of the last battles of the war.

"Edith, he *was* dead—legally and in the eyes of the world. Roy Moore had ceased to exist—his death had been officially recorded and accepted. It must be a strange feeling, to live and yet be dead. What was left of him, a mere physical being from which name and identity had been stripped, worked his way into Germany, then into Scandinavia, and finally to Alaska. From Alaska he came here, to the Yukon. He goes under a name that isn't a name, but just a designation—Stranger. His name is lost."

She had cause to remember again those embittered lines from Lear, recalled when Carlo met Roy in the town: *"Know, my name is lost—by treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit!"* And now, oddly enough, the last two lines seemed significant too, moving her in ways she could not yet understand:

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"Yet am I noble as the adversary I come to cope."

"Of course he can never go back," she observed, rather quietly. "I know, now—why they call him the 'Stranger from Hell.'"

"He's been through it, I guess. He was always a rather sensitive boy—his distant relationship to the Morinos made him that—and the brand of traitor is almost more than any one can bear up under. His people—mighty few of them are left now, by the way—have been irretrievably disgraced, and he's an exile for always, and worse than an exile. He's beyond the pale. Of course he can never appear in the States again—he'd be arrested as soon as he was recognized. Only in this no-man's land of the North, where no one reaches into another's past, can he exist at all."

"Won't some one recognize him here?"

"Perhaps so, but not very likely. I'm the only human being who knew that the poor, mutilated body of that unknown soldier was not Roy Moore, and people aren't looking for him. Besides, only those who knew him well could ever see any resemblance between Roy Moore and Roy Stranger—these years have changed him as you'd never believe possible. Of course if some one did recognize him, he'd flee, and there would be only one man's story against the evidence of the grave's registration service. He's quite convincingly dead. You can see now, Edith, why I had to warn you against him."

"Yes, I can see." Her eyes looked misty, and he regarded them with growing annoyance.

"I have to look out for your reputation, as well as mine. I'd advise you to avoid him in the future."

"You're very considerate, Carlo. I love you dearly for your eagerness to shield me—it's the lover's place. I'll remember all you told me."

She could not very well forget it! The impression it had made would be indelible. Yet Carlo would not have retired with such complacency had he known her real intentions in regard to Roy. It was farthest from her mind to avoid him; and indeed she meant to be kind to him, even companionable as far as he would let her, and try to bring an echo of what he had lost into his bitter, lonely, and tragic life. It would be a strange course to take toward an acknowledged traitor, the folly or evil of whom was charged to have cost the lives of scores of young Americans—but she had her own reason.

Her reason was a good one, and quite feminine—she did not believe he was guilty.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAGEDY OF THE SEINE.

"HOKUM" was Carlo Modesto's favorite word; and it applied to almost everything in the Yukon. To begin with, the old, mad squaw's prophecies were hookum pure and simple, a bid for the coin which Edith had given. The North was largely hokum to start with, and now it was tamed and civilized. Didn't they see the Gopher Prairie Golf Club near one by the most historic Alaskan towns? Couldn't they hear the jazz band from the Diplomat Hotel any time they wanted to listen in on the judge's radio?

And couldn't he see the sky line of wind-bent spruce trees just above the camp? So Edith answered. Good heavens, couldn't he *smell?*"

Some light was thrown on the subject on the last afternoon in May, when the company was doing "snow stuff" on a wintry ridge. This was not canvas scenery. Davis, the director, had found the real thing at last, and he had vision enough to picturize his story full in the heart of it—amid awful chasms, in a wilderness of mountains. Instead of beguiling her from her

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make-believe by its strangeness and beauty, Edith found that the magnificent setting actually contributed to her part. Never had she performed better, believing her rôle and living it with all the sincerity of her artist's soul. Carlo, on the other hand, was somewhat aloof and self-conscious, and once his contemptuous attitude struck fire from Davis.

"Warm up there a little, Modesto," the little red-faced man yelled through his megaphone. "You're not too good for this show. Don't think you're so far above an extra. You couldn't be one again."

This was almost *lèse majesté*. Carlo almost resigned; only his remembrance of his obligation to the public, watching eagerly for his pictures, made him pause.

Although he shone only in reflected glory, Roy Stranger was also an important figure in the day's business. He doubled for Carlo in several bits that the star did not care for; and some of the onlookers said that he took his chances and played his part like an old trooper. Certainly he required no warming-up from Davis. One or two short scenes, at the edge of the ice, above the shadowed, breath-taking void of the cañon, gave several hardened camera men a chilly feeling that was remarkably close to a thrill. Although his fellow players did not know his story, they guessed that something beside the inspiration of noble scenery was behind his surrender to his part, his indifference to consequences. Davis had known men, utterly damned, who drank of the cup in the same calloused way that Roy Stranger drank of danger—coldly, unsentimentally, bent on oblivion.

Yet Roy was not oblivious to the glory about him. Long acquaintance with such scenes had only increased their wonder, and perhaps the wild mountain ram, looking out over his kingdom from a distant eminence, came nearer than any of the newcomers to his mood. It was not entirely happiness; part was loneliness, part sadness, and a great part fear. The gods had been in a rare mood when this land was made. As in great areas throughout the Yukon, its physical features were gigantic—lakes, mountains, deserts, cliffs, and gorges, with the great river itself crowning all, had been landscape-gardened by a colossus, with a giant's foot rule. Beauty had been poured on with the same mighty gesture, as if it were cheap as dirt. One thought of an adventuress, clanking with the jewels of sudden, fabulous wealth. The scene from the ridge was typical: beyond, a pale blue range linking the north and south horizons, and seemingly stretching across the known world; a maze of snow-swept hills nearer at hand; and just below, a downward sweep of gorges checked at last by the azure bow of the river.

In midafternoon a white mist rolled upon the land, slowly dimming the view. Such a change of mood in a mountain landscape is common in the North; yet it was a bewitching thing to watch, and Edith could almost believe it was for her express benefit, an added bit of generosity on the part of the careless giants that ruled the place. Davis, however, did not take so kindly to it. It meant the abrupt cessation of the day's photography.

The river below faded almost out. With slow encroachments the fog moved up through the succession of gorges, softening sharp edges and blurring the hard outlines of the crags, and, like a ghostly invader, it besieged every break in the wall, pouring over low passes, working around promentories, and stealing up the little waterways that opened in the gorges. Soon it was everywhere.

It was a very nebulous fog, and the mystery that it wrought was more than

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compensation for the curtailment of the view. Edith decided not to return to camp at once, and to nourish her love of beauty by watching the spectral progress of the crags through the mist. She easily induced Carlo to stay with her, and, acting on impulse as the man started to pass her, she invited Roy Stranger too.

Although Carlo might be embarrassed, even displeased, it was enough that she had pitied this man—in spite of his scorn of pity—and had sensed his bitter need of human companionship. A man cannot walk alone forever. As he had glanced at her and at Carlo, she thought she had seen a wistful plea through the mocking mask he wore. It was only the slightest hint, the merest suggestion of a break; yet she went out to meet it with her words and her smile.

She had not forgotten that she owed him an incalculable debt. Carlo, his eyes frozen, must make the best of what was apparently a situation awkward in the extreme.

She quite expected Roy to decline, but he paused, smiled, and sat down on the crag beside them. If he were grateful for her kindness he did not show it, nor did he show any trace of embarrassment at Carlo's presence.

"I'd like to join you, very much," he told her lightly. "Even in the 'great silences' one gets tired of silence and occasionally wants to talk."

As always, she was amazed at this man. Now the source of her wonder was his dissimilarity to Carlo, although he was dressed and made up to look as near like him as possible. A somewhat similar cast of features was now quite meaningless.

"This 'great silence' business makes me very ill," Carlo remarked. "That's part of the hokum—that, and the wolf pack, and the open places where men are men. I've been here almost two weeks, now, and haven't seen a sign of a wolf. And if there's anything silent about that damnable wind that shrieks around my tent, I'd like to hear it."

Edith smiled quietly in Stranger's general direction. "Mr. Modesto almost gives the impression of not liking the country, doesn't he?"

"And I don't!" Carlo exclaimed even more heated at Edith's coolness. "I abominate the place. Thank Heaven, I'm going to get out of it soon. I never had a worse part or played a more impossible story. A man and a girl, cut off by a flooded river and forced to spend the winter in the woods! Why, there are people everywhere. The idea of any one being cast away for a week, much less all winter, anywhere in Canada in these days is absurd on the face of it. Such conditions might have been true once, but now I don't suppose you could go a week's journey from a tourist hotel if you tried to. The river that's supposed to cut off the hero and heroine probably has a concrete automobile bridge over it. I tell you, it's hard for a man to be true to his art when he knows the story he is playing couldn't possibly come true."

This was quite an explosion, but Stranger looked and smiled. "You must remember this is the land of romance—not merely reputed to be, but actually is," he explained. "It is like a whole continent in size, and the longer you stay in it, the more it bewilders you—the less surprised you are at what it may show you."

"I'd be mightily surprised to have some of those events I've been doing before the camera come true to me——"

He paused, and the others waited for him to continue. They had heard no inflection on his final word indicating a conclusion; and for the long lapse of a second neither realized that he had been interrupted, and that the overdrawn and impossible scenes of the picture-play had flown wide and far from his mind.

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Even when they did discern the truth it was by different avenues. Roy's special perfection was the development of his senses, and presently his keen ear caught a subdued sound behind him, in the direction Carlo was facing. Being a wilderness man it must be that he should turn swiftly. He looked up to see an unknown man emerging on the top of the ridge.

He could not imagine why the figure startled him, and somehow conveyed the effect of an apparition. Strangers were not uncommon about the camp. He believed wholly in mental telepathy, because he had seen it proven; and he wondered if his secret start was conveyed to him from the mind of one of his two companions, as when wild things are seen to sense an alarm at the same instant.

Edith's strong point was not senses, but sensibilities. She did not hear the sound of the man's step; yet she had been prompted to whirl suddenly and look into Carlo's face. Carlo was her life, so her eyes went to him first.

He had been rather ashen the night he had unexpectedly encountered an old acquaintance on the streets of the town. Now he was stark pale, a phenomenon of some interest in that his Latin darkness became instantly wanly yellow and cadaverous. His face was drawn, his position frozen, and his eyes staring. She perceived all this at a glimpse; at once she turned to find the source of his violent emotion.

She, too, saw the stranger, and failed to remember ever seeing him before. He was harmless looking enough, at close view—a rather short, stocky, round-faced, blond-complexioned man, puffing from his long climb up the ridge.

She turned again to find that Carlo had emerged from his trance as quickly as he had entered it. He had sprung up, and a smile, intended to be of welcome, greeted the stranger. Was he acting? If not, his stare of the moment before had been of amazement instead of terror.

She was not satisfied yet, but as the seconds trooped away, every fact seemed to indicate that she was needlessly alarmed. The men were shaking hands warmly.

"Well, Otto, this is a great surprise," Carlo was saying. "What on earth brings you here? I must present you to my fiancée, Miss Quentin. Edith, this is Otto Muller, whom you've heard me speak of."

Edith bowed to him, in the meantime trying in vain to recall ever having heard his name. He turned toward Roy with a look of interest, but Carlo did not offer an introduction.

"Of course you're surprised to see me here," the man said. "You naturally would be, considering the last that I saw you was 'Over There.' You're looking better than you did then."

"You're not hunting gold too, are you?" Carlo asked. "I can't imagine what else would bring you to the Yukon."

"Well, I guess I'm hunting gold—every one is, that I know anything about." He laughed at his own wit. "My friend, I came clear up here to Alaska on purpose to see you, and I want you to appreciate it. I asked for you at Hollywood, and they told me where to find you, and since I was anxious to see you, and was in a hurry, and didn't mind a visit North, I caught the first boat. The cook at your camp in the valley told me you were all out here taking pictures, so I walked out, and here I am."

A perceptible pause, hushed and startling, followed his words. "Then your business must be pretty important," Carlo observed calmly. "Perhaps I'd better ask my friends to leave us together."

"If they wouldn't mind. My business is important, sure enough." He looked

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at Carlo, and smiled suggestively. "I might say its mighty important."

So the girl got up, and Roy followed her a hundred yards down the long slope of the ridge, where she halted to wait for Carlo. "Shall I go on in?" he asked.

"If you want to, or have anything special to do." She glanced at the dim figures on the eminence above. "If you are free, I'd rather you'd stay here a while. I suppose it's nonsense, but I can't help thinking that perhaps that man is bringing trouble to Carlo. To come all the way up here, when he could wait a few weeks to see him at Hollywood—and then Carlo wasn't glad to see him! I could tell he was unpleasantly surprised."

"Maybe he is just afraid of being bored."

"No. Carlo is not easily bored, except by places like this. I feel sure the man brought bad news, or something."

"I'd enjoy staying, if you want me." So they found a crag to sit on, now gray and cold, but in the morning gilded by a rising sun. Here they talked of general topics, only occasionally glancing at the figures above them.

Was this North still the land of romance and adventure? She wondered. And suddenly she had her answer—such an answer as she had never dreamed, and never anticipated in her blackest fears. It was flung down to her by the little wind blowing along the ridge.

She heard Carlo's voice, yelling—but not the voice of the Carlo she knew. Its even flow was broken—it was like a river which, moving quietly, suddenly leaps, roaring, down a falls. Where was its restraint, its perfect modulation, its aristocratic detachment? It was a bellow of rage, revealing for the first time the choleric and passionate incarnation under his skin.

The sound smote her like a close-range blow, startling and shocking her with its violence; but in the mist the scene that made it was ghostly and dim. She saw Carlo standing with upraised arms, a shadow-silhouette in the fog. She saw Muller shrinking back from him, his arm held as if sheltering some small object.

"I'll fix you!" her lover was yelling, and she saw him lunge.

The incredible act that followed was over and done in the rush of a second. Carlo seized the man, swung him with a strength which she had never dreamed he possessed, and hurled him down over the brink of the chasm.

A dark shadow streaked before her eyes, visible only an instant from her higher position—then there ensued a quick tattoo of queer bumping sounds. And a long time afterward a minute black object jerked and came to rest against a snow bank that was far below.

A rushing minute—and then the sweeping in of silence! Carlo stood at the brink of the gorge, and because his arms were lifted as before, the deed he had done seemed a dream. The crags moved through the mist. Far below the placid river rippled—rippled to the sea.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

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Steel Bound

By

Russell Arden Bankson

Author of "Man Bait," etc.

POLISHED steel handcuffs slid shut with a soft clicking sound, and the two men stood there manacled together.

Deputy Sheriff "Bud" Ridpath, looking down at the smaller man who was his prisoner, answered the startled look in his face.

"I'm not taking any chances with you, Jake," he said. "You and me aren't going to part company until the deal's over."

Jake Bennett, bandit, doubled his powerful fists slowly, as though he would strike the other.

"They's forty mile t' go!" he said snarlingly, a threat in his voice. "Things can happen."

Bud took the key to the handcuffs from his right pocket. It dangled on a slender chain, which he twirled about his index finger.

"Things won't happen, though," he said.

Unconsciously Jake's muscles became tense again, his left hand, which was free, half reaching to snatch the key away.

"Cut it!" Bud warned him sharply.

Instantly he let the chain unwind and slip from his fingers, carrying the key in a wide arc through the air away from the trail and over the edge of the precipitous walls which drooped away into the rough, boulder-clogged cañon below.

"The only other key to those pretties is in the sheriff's office at Okanogan," he said. "Let's get started toward them."

"Yuh fool!" Jake raged at him, suddenly finding his tongue. "Yuh'd be in a purty mess, come a accident t' one er t'other o' us, without no key, wouldn't yuh? Only a durned fool 'u'd do a trick like that."

"I'll take the chance," Bud answered.

It was the first real chance Bud had had since he had come into the chief deputyship in that wild county, and the capture of Jake Bennett, wanted for a series of bold stage robberies, extending over a period of several years, was the super-task which he had set himself. Already the bandit had led him a terrific chase, and in the end it had only been by the merest chance that he had got the drop on his man.

Both men had lost their wiry hill cayuses the day before in a running exchange of shots, and they were afoot in that wilderness of almost impenetrable mountains. Disheartened, Bud was on his way out, over the vague trail which cut across the range to civiliza-

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tion, when he had come unexpectedly face to face with Jake, heading deeper into the wilds. Bud, the first to recover, had beaten the other in a lightning draw and had shot Jake's gun from his hand as he brought it up.

Now the real task faced the officer. Forty miles of narrow trails and rough country with his body linked to that of a dangerous bandit with unbreakable steel bonds!

The disposal of the key which would have freed them was a precaution which might cost him dearly. But it was one he did not hesitate to take, for once before Jake Bennett had been captured. Only that time, even with his hands manacled, he had succeeded in making his escape. This time Bud meant to deliver Jake Bennett to the law.

"You will walk in front," he ordered.

Jake turned to the trail sullenly and began to make awkward progress forward and downward toward the floor of the cañon. For two miles they traveled in silence. Only once they stopped, suddenly, while Bud shot a blue grouse from the limbs of a tree above the trail. They would want it for their supper when evening came. But they stopped and made camp long before dark.

The strained position in which they were forced to walk was tiring, and when Jake grudgingly suggested that they stop, Bud was more than willing.

During the entire afternoon they had made less than five miles of the journey, and they had been forced to rest on several occasions during that time.

Jake was a seasoned veteran of rough traveling, and showed little effects from the strain, but Bud, less hardened, was almost completely exhausted.

In spite of this, he stayed awake or dozed fitfully, with his gun in his right hand during the night, while Jake slept soundly.

The first rays of the morning sun slanting down into the cañon found the two men with their breakfast over and on the trail again.

The sullenness had slipped from Jake, and he seemed almost cheerful as he leered at his captor. Bud's muscles were leaden, though, and his brain fogged with fatigue as he forced his feet forward, scarcely hearing the bantering conversation which Jake carried on intermittently as they plugged along.

That day became a terrible nightmare to Bud Ridpath, and he fought against the anguish of a swollen wrist where the steel bond chafed at the flesh. Even when Jake stumbled and fell, dragging him forward, he only gritted his teeth the harder and fought his way to his feet with his right hand on the butt of his gun, ready for the other.

Their food supply was low. By the merest chance, though, Bud shot a large snowshoe rabbit, just before dusk, and they eagerly ate their fill of the tender meat, after it had been baked in clay.

"Reckon yuh better let me set up an' keep the boogers away t'-night, Bud," Jake suggested sneeringly. "Look like yuh was a-needin' some rest."

"I wouldn't trust a rattlesnake," Bud flared back.

But his muscles, once he had relaxed, refused to obey his will. He slumped down to the ground, a slow coma creeping over him, while Jake watched him, his own eyes heavy.

Bud drifted away and came wide awake with a terrified start, only to find that Jake was sound asleep, breathing regularly and heavily.

For what seemed hour after hour, after that, he sat there bolt upright, desperately counting stars in the blue expanse of the night sky above him. Then he knew that he could not fight it back longer, for the stars were all blurring together.

"Got to get him back! Got to get him back!" he began to say aloud, over and over. His voice died to a whisper,

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and his head slumped forward onto his chest.

He studied the dim outlines of the form beside him. Jake twitched in his sleep, jerking at the steel handcuffs which bound them.

An idea came to Bud. He had not dared to go to sleep because Jake might arouse and stealthily take his gun from him. But he could lay the gun just within reach on the opposite side from Jake, so the outlaw could not find it without disturbing him. Quietly he shoved the gun along the ground until he could barely touch it, then he relaxed into a sleep which was sound at first, but later was broken with nightmares, and with the growing pain in his wrist.

It was in the chilly mountain gray just before dawn that he fully aroused, with the smothering sense of impending danger.

Jake was crouched above him on his knees, his face twisted in an ugly snarl, his body leaning forward for a sudden powerful lunge at the throat of his captor.

Instinctively Bud's free hand went down to his hip before he remembered. His gun was beyond his quick reach. But he did not lose his head in the moment of desperation. His voice calm, he held his hand at his hip.

"I'll kill you if you move!" he said quietly.

Jake laughed harshly. "They's other nights. Yuh ain't always goin' t' wake up before I'm on top o' yuh!"

Bud got painfully to his feet and Jake followed him. The two stood facing each other.

"We'll pound it through to-day," Bud said. "Or else we'll drop in the effort. I'm not taking any more chances like that."

Quickly he reached down and gathered up the gun from the ground.

In the middle of the morning they stopped to cook and eat another blue grouse which Bud brought down. Then they moved on slowly, grinding out the miles with ever-lagging steps, stopping to rest with greater frequency.

Along in the middle of the afternoon Bud began to take note of where they were. It was a new country to him, a region which he had never traversed. And suddenly he made the discovery that they were not following the well-defined trail on which they had started.

"Where is Okanogan?" he asked Jake. In his own mind he was certain of the direction, but a shadow of doubt caused him to want it verified by the other.

Jake stared at him in alarm. "Don't yuh know where yuh're goin'?" he demanded.

Bud jerked his head up toward the divide. "Up there," he said. "I just wanted to see whether you knew your directions yet."

"That ain't the way t' Okanogan," Jake answered slowly. "I got it figgered out in my head. It's over t' the left, through that gap in the range."

Bud studied the face of the other. He was watching for a trick. The prisoner would naturally be alert to lead his captor astray, to lose him in the wilderness in the hope of effecting an escape.

But there was something about his speech and his attitude that warned Bud he was speaking the truth so far as he knew it.

The officer calculated his bearings again from the low-hanging sun, as he had frequently done during their journey. Again he sized up the range of mountains toward which they had been pushing. They must cross that divide, he was certain. The sun told him that was northwest—and northwest they must travel from their starting point.

"You're off, Jake," he said.

"We been headin' steady north," Jake answered. "That's the way we been

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goin' ever since this mornin'. I'm sure of that."

Bud inwardly was a little alarmed. He admitted to himself that he had not paid particular attention to the exact course they had traveled that day, certain that they were following the main trail over the divide to the county-seat town. Only when the trail had suddenly seemed to vanish and leave them in the wilderness of jagged mountains and deep cañons did he become aware that directions were absolutely essential to their escape.

"Where did we leave that main trail?" he mused, looking back along the mountainside.

"I wasn't watchin'," Jake answered. "It musta just sorta petered out. That durned steel bracelet's been hurtin', and I wasn't thinkin' about much else."

Somehow, in this sudden and mutual peril, they forgot to be suspicious of each other.

"We've got to head back and find that trail," Bud announced. "It goes straight."

Slowly, rather painfully, they started back, retracing their steps along the mountainside. They moved awkwardly for an hour. Dusk was coming on, yet they did not pick up the trail. At last, as dark was flooding in over them, they stopped. They were in a cañon which neither recognized as ever having traversed before.

"Let's camp," Bud said wearily.

"We're lost!" Jake answered.

Bud sank down into the luxurious mountain grass and Jake stretched out beside him. They did not build a fire or consider food, except the cold remnants of the previous meal, which they had carried with them in their pockets.

Both slept soundly that night. There was no thought of attempting escape, on the part of one, nor thought of self-protection on the part of the other. They were utterly dejected, and Bud was so weary that he did not move.

It was full daylight when Jake opened his eyes and sat up. The movement instantly aroused Bud, and he was up, too, blinking his swollen eyes, while his brain gathered his thoughts together.

In the bright light the fear which had possessed them the night before, seemed to vanish.

"We'll pick the trail up first thing and get started right," Bud said.

At noon, though, they were still helplessly and hopelessly lost, though another snowshoe rabbit, cooked over an open fire, had somewhat revived their strength and their spirits.

Bud was obsessed with a wild determination to get his prisoner to the seat of justice, and this obsession grew as the day wore on and he felt his strength ebbing. His brain became possessed of the idea that Jake was watching him, silently laughing at him, leading him about aimlessly, wearing him out so that when he could travel no more the captive might overpower him.

The two men now were snarling at each other. They would have been at each other's throats, fighting it out there in the silence of the wilderness, fighting until death had come to one or both, had it not been for the sinister gun which Bud carried at his hip, and on which his right hand rested steadily.

When dusk came again it seemed that they had gained nowhere, yet slowly but surely Bud, less hardened, was breaking down. His face was haggard, almost gaunt; his step was uncertain, faltering.

They rested on a little shelf of ground halfway up the divide. Bud sat with his head pillowed on his knees. For a long time they remained there like this, then Bud looked up, his bleary eyes turned toward the man bound to him by bonds of steel. A sudden determination lighted his face; his lips half parted to speak. Then he checked himself.

Hatred, blood lust, hot murder were reflected in Jake's face. His reason was

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beyond caring what he did; his mouth twitched in a frenzy to kill this human demon who held him bound.

"I've got to turn you in!" Bud mumbled thickly.

"Two o' us dead fer the wolves t' howl over!" exclaimed Jake.

Words failed them then, and they sat there staring off toward the ridge over across the cañon, watching the light slip into dusk and the dusk into darkness.

"Yuh fool!" Jake whined once, more to himself than to the other silent figure. Bud did not hear him, and Jake went on, reasoning aloud.

"Them steel things is hookin' us t'-gether. Him croaked an' I still got t' stick with him. Ain't no way o' gettin' loose."

He thought this over and over, even after Bud had slumped backward onto the ground and was asleep. His eyes kindled with a new fire. He could kill the officer. He could crush his skull with boulders which were within reach of his free left hand. He brooded over this long and carefully. He had to kill Bud Ridpath.

Carefully he began to feel around in the dark, choosing a stone with which he could strike down at the other.

Presently his fingers found what they sought, and he gathered the stone up, feeling it over carefully, gripping his fingers about it. It was a heavy stone, like a bludgeon, with a jagged point on one side. Leaning forward, he peered into the face of the officer, listening to his heavy breathing, making certain where he lay.

In doing so his right hand moved, and he became conscious of the manacled wrist. Like a specter there hung over him the menace of those steel bonds which would bind him after life had left the body of his captor.

It wasn't this fear altogether which caused his hand to lower slowly to the ground again and let the rock roll away. The acute sense of his danger was clearing his brain. And he knew that he could not crush to death this other human being. He was not a killer.

Trembling at the nearness of that which he had contemplated, he slumped over into a heap and lay there staring into the night until his eyes grew glassy, fixed, then closed in slumber, filled with nightmares.

When morning came he was still sleeping. It was Bud who aroused him. Bud was feverish, famished for water, weak from hunger. He had broken down at last under the strain, and was not wholly clear what had happened.

Tugging at the manacles, he aroused Jake. The act unleased anew the savageness of the bandit. In the darkness of night he could not crush the life from the helpless, sleeping man beside him. But in the fullness of day with the other tugging at his swollen wrist, cursing at him, he was a madman. Leaping forward, he struck a smashing blow at Bud with his left fist, then rolled over on him, pushing him back, reaching for his throat to choke him.

Bud fought desperately, and the two, rolling, kicking, tearing at each other, began to slip down the slope of the mountainside.

The gun fell from the holster at Bud's hip, but neither knew this as they rolled over the edge of the little plateau and began to slip down the steeper grade, locked close in each other's arms.

A hundred feet below they came to rest in the midst of a clump of small fir saplings. The fight was taken out of them then, and they loosened their holds, lying there inert, breathing heavily.

The encounter had served them good, for it had cleared their brains of the clouds which were befogging them. Both knew that to live, those steel bonds must be severed.

"We've come to the end, Jake," Bud gasped out, drawing himself together and sitting up shakily.

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From far above them on the mountainside there came to their ears the sudden sharp jangle of loosened rocks striking against each other as they tumbled downward.

Whatever Bud had intended to say was lost. A new fear was upon them, a real fear that drove them to instant action. Somewhere up among the crags, the careless foot of some passing animal, or a blast of wind had loosened the rocks, sending them bounding and leaping downward to crush them.

"We're gone!" Bud shouted.

Jake stood up beside him. Far up there they saw a heavy boulder leap into the air and bound forward. A smaller rock, outdistancing the mass, drove through the air, passing over their heads with a whirring whistle like a heavy shell from an artillery gun.

They began to run, then, parallel with the mountain, toward the scanty shelter of an overhanging ledge a hundred feet away.

A veritable shower of smaller rocks began to fly about them. One struck Jake on the knee and stunned his leg. He fell headlong, dragging Bud with him.

They rolled a dozen feet, luckily toward the shelter, the steel manacles holding them together, tearing deeply into their wrists.

Bud came up on his feet though, and dragged Jake up with him.

"Don't stop!" Bud begged.

With his torn, bleeding arm he supported the prisoner, almost carrying him forward. Then, with the last ounce of his strength, he staggered into the semi-safety of the ledge as the slide was upon them. Shoving Jake forward and into the shelter, he flung his own body on top of the other.

It was not a bad slide, or neither could possibly have survived in the scant shelter the lip of protruding granite offered. There was little earth in it to bury them, and the rocks glanced from the ledge and bounded over them, for the most part.

Jake came through without further injury, but Bud, raising his head too high, caught a glancing blow on the skull from a flying rock and was rendered unconscious.

How long the two men lay there is not certain, but it was well on into the afternoon before Jake began to stir. Bud was still unconscious, all but dead, and Jake flung the heavy load from him as he crawled to a sitting position.

Again the bitterness of his hatred for this man who had linked their lives together in inseparable steel bonds swept over him and he cursed the inert form, kicking at it savagely.

He had no doubt but that Bud was dead, and the irony of it drove reason from him. Here he was, linked to a dead man who, even in death, was dragging him on to the same fate.

He had forgotten the pain of his torn wrist, but the leg which had been numbed by the first falling stone was throbbing with the return of circulation, and he began to rub it with his free hand.

Out of this grew an idea. If he had a knife he might yet free [illegible] self from the other and save his [illegible]

He reached over and [illegible] Bud's heart. There was life there yet, but his eyes kindled with the fire of a new hope.

The officer was dying. He would be dead in a few minutes—an hour at most. The knowledge that a way to freedom lay ahead brought a new surge of life into Jake's body, and he sat there rigidly erect, waiting for death to come to the other.

He never took his eyes from Bud's face until the darkness had set in again. Then he crouched there with his hand on the officer's heart, waiting for it to cease beating.

There were times during that long night when Bud's heartbeats came to be

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so low that they were almost stilled; then there were times when they seemed to be stronger, as though a new thread of life were weaving back into the broken body.

At these times Jake cursed softly to himself, there in the still night. In this last hope which flickered in his burned-out soul he had forgotten the anguish of thirst which had swollen his tongue and cracked his lips; he had forgotten the pangs of hunger which were taking the strength from his body. He thought only of that other man bound to him, and of the moment when the other should die.

But when daylight came again, Bud Ridpath still hovered between life and death.

Stealthily, a quirk of superstition creeping over him, Jake searched the pockets of the officer and withdrew a heavy hunting knife for which he was looking. It was the one Bud had used in preparing the game they had eaten on previous days.

"Curse him!" he swore, to keep his determination up. When death came to the other he was going to free himself.

Then, the knife clutched tightly in his left hand, he waited. The slow minutes moved forward like a procession before his eyes until they had marched into an hour—two hours.

Bud Ridpath stirred and flung his free arm out in a gesture of unconscious pain. His sensibilities were returning to him, and Jake cursed again, loudly, wildly. He could not murder a man who lay there helpless, unconscious.

"Yuh cursed fool, can't yuh die?" Jake raised his voice to the other.

Those words flung out into the deathly silence of the wilderness seemed to penetrate the subconsciousness of the other, and Bud opened his eyes.

Memory gone, he smiled weakly up into the face of Jake Bennett, bad man. "Hard time we had, old pal!" he mumbled thickly. "Devil of a hard time, wasn't it?" His eyes closed again, and he was silent, leaving Jake to sit there staring at him, a startled fear creeping into his face.

"Say! Yuh gone blooey?" he demanded suddenly.

Bud opened his eyes again. Memories were creeping back to him. "You there, Jake?" he asked. His right hand began to waver about through the air. "Where are you, Jake? I'd sort of like to feel your hand."

Surprised, reluctant, Jake's left hand went out and steadied the other. "I'm here!"

"Thought maybe you were gone." Bud's thick tongue formed the words after a painful minute. His fingers gripped tightly about the hand of the other. "I've been trying to tell you something for a long time, Jake," he went on. "I was just planning to tell you when those darned rocks began to slide down on us. They would have gotten you sure, if I hadn't dragged you over here and piled on top of you. Funny thing, me doing that. But it flashed into me I hadn't been square, tying you up like this so you couldn't help yourself. Remember when that rock got you on the leg and dumped you? I thought we were both goners then."

Jake remembered. Bud Ridpath had dragged him to safety, saved his life.

"Yep," he grunted.

"Well, I did that because I wanted to tell you something, Jake," the officer continued as though he had not been interrupted. His voice grew faint, then, and died away to a whisper.

Jake leaned forward eagerly to catch the words, but they were so low that he could not hear them. A new fear seized him. The other was about to die, and he was trying to tell him, Jake, something.

But the officer was not ready to die yet. He was only utterly exhausted, half delirious with his injuries and with

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thirst. Two minutes passed, and then he began to talk again.

"I swore I was going to take you in, Jake," he said, his voice growing stronger. "There was only one sure way of doing that, and that was to hook us together. Then I had to throw the key away or you would have gotten me when I was off guard. You would have killed me for that key, and I knew it. But I knew you wouldn't do that if I was tied to you, anyway.

"Back there on the mountain, though, I knew I couldn't make it any farther. I knew one or the other of us had to die, and I was going to tell you something." His lips ceased moving, his eyes were closed.

In a frenzy Jake shook him roughly. "Talk!" he shouted. "What yun got t' say?"

It was five minutes this time before the officer's eyes came open, and then he stared at the other for a moment before speaking. "It's no use. I can't make it any farther," he muttered. "I'm a gonner. You can save yourself, Jake. Only next time—some one will get you—sure!"

Silence again, then almost at once his lips were moving. He was talking in a whisper. "Gonner—need some water—save—self—got 'nother key!"

Jake's heart gave a mad leap. In that broken sentence a new vision of life and freedom swung open before him. A new world opened up. There was another key, and he was saved!

"Curse yuh! Where is it?" he snarled. "Come on here, yuh fool! Holdin' it out on me, was yuh? Thought yuh could get by with that on Jake Bennett, did yuh? Gimme that key!"

"Sewed in lining—coat—just under—inside pocket," Bud said. "Put it there—case something happened. Was trying—tell you about it."

Cursing, mumbling to himself, his eyes burning bright, Jake seized the hunting knife from the ground where it had dropped when he took Bud's hand.

Tearing open the coat, his fingers searched eagerly for the key to the handcuffs. Then, at the touch of the little metal object, the knife cut the cloth clean away, releasing it.

With a hand that trembled violently, he got the key and lost a whole minute struggling to fit it into the lock on the cuff about his own wrist.

A wilder fear than he had ever before known was upon him. What if the key did not fit? What if this were simply a terrible hoax which this dying fiend were playing on him?

He swore aloud. But just then the key slipped into the opening and the steel bond swung apart, releasing his wrist.

For a moment which seemed an eternity, while he lived over again his whole life, Jake Bennett sat there staring at the swollen member, holding it out before his eyes, his lips moving without uttering words.

Slowly he began to crawl shakily to his feet, again picking up the knife.

In leaning forward to rise, his face was suspended only a few inches above that of his enemy.

Bud Ridpath was watching him, looking up into his face. He made a feeble effort at a smile. "Sort of a relief, isn't it, Jake?" he asked. "Feel stronger myself already. Only I couldn't ever make it out of here alone. Save yourself. And you might send word to the boys. Some of them would want to come up here and find—what's left of me."

Jake stood up, wabbling unsteadily. He was free. And down there in the cañon, at the foot of the range, there was water. And there were fish in that water, to be had for food.

He took a step toward them, and stumbled over Bud's extended leg.

"Why can't yuh keep t' yuhrself?" he snarled.

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He caught his balance and plunged forward. He took half a dozen steps. Then he checked himself, listening. Bud was calling to him in a rather nervous voice.

"Tell—boys——" That was as far as he could go.

Jake cursed savagely. Life and strength were surging back through his body. The far fields of safety and freedom were calling to him. But he waited for that voice to go on. It did not.

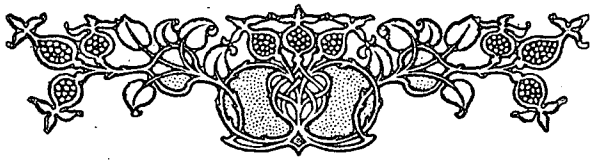
Suddenly he turned and began to climb steadily back to Bud Ridpath.

As though steel bonds were still fettering them together, he climbed back and bent over the prostrate form. Bud was looking at him. "S'long, Jake! Tell the boys——"

"The devil of a mess!" Jake snarled again. "Yuh won't die, an' I can't leave yuh here. Got t' git some water an' grub into yuh an' lug yuh out t' a doc. A devil of a mess!"

"S'long."

Jake Bennett, grumbling, cursing, was bending down, though, dragging the heavy body awkwardly to his back. Bud Ridpath had given Jake Bennett back his life when he set him free. And the code of the hills was a life for a life. Jake Bennett, bandit, was giving his enemy back his life.



THE WOLF NOT A MAN KILLER

NO one disputes that a wolf has both cunning and bravery. He may not be the bravest animal on the plains, and certainly we are all ready to confess that his smaller brother of the prairie, the coyote, is a coward. But will a wolf attack a man? The wolf is making his last stand in North America, for the Biological Survey estimated some time ago that there are not more than five hundred wolves in all our Western States.

"Br'er Wolf's" back is certainly against the snow walls of the arctic, and he has been a bad actor, but evidently not a man killer, if we can accept the authority of those who ought to know. Doctor A. K. Fisher of the Biological Survey declared some time ago that there is not a single case on record where a wolf has attacked a human being in North America. Arthur Hemming, a Canadian naturalist, asserts positively that the wolf is not a man killer. To prove his point he enumerates various facts. His contention is born out by W. J. Thompson, a fur dealer of the Ontario, Canada, forests. In these forests wolves are very common, but Thompson says he has never known one to attack a man, and he declares that his trappers report that the sight of a human being is enough to put even the largest to flight.

The reappearance of the wolf in the Eastern States, is not an authenticated fact. Reports appear from time to time in the newspaper that the wolf has made his reappearance. Several were reported to have been seen in the Adirondacks. The State Conservation Commission checked up these reports and discovered that the "wolf killed by a South Lyons farmer" was a coyote, as was also the "large male wolf" shot on Duane Mountain, and the pack of five timber wolves said to have been seen near Saratoga Lake turned out to be one lone collie.

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In the River Bottom's Grip

by

Max Brand

Author of "Lew and Slim," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE AZATLANS.

OOK, first, into the office of Cordoba, money lender of Barneytown; let me show him to you in his office, seated on a broad bench with his back to the wall and his table in front of him. But why should the rich man sit on a bench? Because he changed his position from time to time. Sometimes he sat erect upon the bench, but that was not the posture which pleased him most. He was erect now; in fact, there was a dent in his fat back, he was so erect. And his black eyes, ordinarily dull and not overlarge, were glancing brightly into the face of his visitor.

It was Señor Don Mateo Valdez who lounged in the other chair, son of the rich Valdez who owned the great cattle ranch at the mouth of Barney Valley. Outside the house, hitched to the light buggy in which young Valdez had driven to town, stood two fine-limbed horses, still sweating and trembling from the merciless fury of their trip north. He was dressed in full Mexican regalia, was Don Mateo, and his delicate fingers held the cigarette gracefully and waved away the smoke which dribbled from his lips.

"It is only last month that you came to me last," said the money lender.

"A month is a long time," said the spendthrift, "because it has thirty days, and money leaves me on every day!"

"That is true, then," admitted Cordoba. "However—five thousand dollars——"

"What is that to me?" said Don Mateo. "Considering what security I have to offer——"

"Ah, but what security have you?"

"Señor!" cried Mateo, lifting his handsome, languid eyes.

"What security?" repeated the money lender.

"My father's ranch——"

"The ranch is your father's, however—pardon me—and not yours."

"It will soon be mine!"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Cordoba.

"Señor?"

"I trust that your father has a long life before him."

"He is ill."

"That I know."

"Then read this." He offered a letter signed by a doctor. It read:

MY DEAR DON MATEO: It is true that your father has not a month to live. However,

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this news must be kept secret. No one must know it. For if it comes to his ears, the shock will surely kill him at once!

The money lender lifted his eyes slowly. "He has been a great man," sighed he. "And this letter is to be kept a secret?"

"To a man like you—full of honor—tight-mouthed—what harm is there in showing it?"

"Well," answered the money lender, "we each have different ways of thought. If this seems good to you, it is good. And I admit that it makes you good security. What sum will you have?"

"Ten thousand," said Don Mateo, his eyes snapping with pleasure.

"You must be careful," said Cordoba with an odd smile, "that your entire estate does not run into my hands—at this rate."

"I? Careful? I shall be careful in time! But one must have money—to live like a gentleman."

"This will cost you twelve per cent."

"Ha? That is a double rate, Cordoba!"

"That is true, but it is a double risk."

"In what way, then?"

"Suppose that your father should change his will and leave you nothing."

"Tush! He loves me! Besides, what could make him?"

"The knowledge that you are showing me this letter, perhaps."

"Well," said Don Mateo, "let me have the money at any rate. I have no time."

What does it cost to scratch one's name upon a piece of paper? And behold, the fat money lender waddled across his office, taking with him a short-barreled shotgun of large bore. He opened his safe. From a drawer he selected a parcel of money and returned with it.

"How much does that safe contain, then?" asked Mateo, his eyes glistening with hunger.

"You have almost exhausted the contents," said Cordoba.

"Shall I believe that? Adios, señor!"

Don Mateo was gone, but there was another instantly in his place—an old man with a rigid back which crumpled over as he sat down in the chair. He was bent so that his chin was thrust out, and he peered earnestly at Cordoba through his spectacles. Cordoba, straightway, leaned back and tucked his feet beneath him. He sat cross-legged to do business with this customer.

"The interest was due me yesterday," said Cordoba.

"Ah, yes, God knows!" said the old man.

"And *I* know," said Cordoba sternly. "What has happened?"

"I have brought you in—only half the money."

"So?"

"Ah, Señor Cordoba—you are great in wisdom," said the old Mexican. "You know how the blackleg struck on my little ranch, and the cattle died like flies! I have been stripped. I have been beggared. I bring you this money. You may take a larger mortgage on my ranch for the rest of your money."

"You have three sons," said Cordoba, more coldly than ever.

"By the mercy of God, I have three sons. It is true."

"They have left you, I suppose, now that your little ranch is like a poorhouse?"

"Left me? No, no, no! They stand beside me; they work like three dogs. My eldest boy said this morning: 'You shall not be shamed by going to confess to Cordoba. Let me go and take the brunt of his tongue!'"

"Ha!" said Cordoba. "Did he say that?"

"Ten thousand, thousand pardons! You are angry, then?"

"I am very angry—that people should think I would use my tongue like a whip. Well, my friend, cattle are cheap, now,

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since the drought has made them so lean."

"They are like dirt. One names a price—the cow is yours! But mine are not lean. I have pasture enough!"

"That is true. How many could you fatten of those lean ones? Ah, three hundred, at least.

"Here is a note from me. Show it where you please. Go buy, and send them to Cordoba for their money. When you have bought two hundred, come back to me and I shall take your note for the money which I have loaned you. As for this other interest money—it is forgotten. Take it back to your three sons, Santiago, and tell them that you surely will not starve for this winter!"

Then he jumped from his bench and rushed Santiago from the room before the rancher could shower him with thanks. He had barely returned to his bench—with the shotgun beside him, when a third man entered, very different from the other two—a broad-shouldered, brown-faced Yankee, wreathed in an immense smile.

"Well, Fatty," said he, "I knew that I could not lose if I got you into the game with me, and I was right. I hit it quick. It come off like cream off the top of the bottle. Then a sucker offered me twelve thousand for the claim. I'd taken out three thousand. I grabbed the twelve; and here I am with the hard cash. Well, Fatty, your grubstake gives you seventy-five hundred! Count it out!" And he slammed down a pot-bellied wallet on the table.

The Mexican opened it without a word. He counted out a thin sheaf of bills.

"The horse, the tools—everything, cost me only five hundred," said he. "I shall take two thousand. And the rest is yours."

"Hey!" barked out the American. "Are you gunna cheat yourself out of fifty-five hundred that belongs to you?"

"I have four hundred per cent. It is very much," said Cordoba. "And adios, friend."

"Is that all? Why, Cordoba, this ain't right—and——"

A panting youth ran through the door. "Don Luis——" he gasped out in a trembling voice.

Cordoba rolled with surprising rapidity to his feet. "What of Don Luis?" he cried. "Adios, adios, señor! I am very busy, as you see!"

And the prospector, feeling that he had just been in the midst of a happy dream, hurried out into the day to make sure that this generosity was not in fact the stuff that dreams are made of.

"Now you speak of my son, of Don Luis?" cried the money lender to the youngster. "What is there to say of him?"

"May he always be fortunate," gasped out the boy, recovering his breath as fast as he might. "But I have just heard through my cousin that Miguel and Cristobal Azatlan——"

"What are they?"

"It was a year ago, señor, that Don Luis met with their brother, a very famous fighter from Mexico——"

"And killed that man?"

"Yes."

"Quick, boy! And tell me if the have come to revenge his death?"

"It is that—yes!"

Cordoba wrung his fat hands. "The Lord bring them to a wicked end!" cried he. "But now, boy, do not let a word of this come to the ears of Señor Don Luis Melody."

"Señor Cordoba! Will you not warn him?"

"Warn him?" echoed Cordoba. "Name of heaven, no!"

"But they are dreadful fighters! Miguel Azatlan on a day in Juarez——"

"Do not tell me! Do not tell me! Foolish boy, do you not know that the more dreadful they are, the more my son will wish to meet them?"

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CHAPTER II.

LEW, A MEXICAN GALLANT.

CORDOBA straightway locked his office securely and mounted a horse strong enough to bear up his weight, but passive enough to suit his rather timorous temper; it was a sort of rough plow horse which jogged with him through the twisting alleys of the Mexican quarter, and over the rickety bridge, which was known as the danger line, and so arching above the waters of the yellow Barney River into the American section of the village on the eastern bank. He went straight to the jail, and there he found Sheriff Joe Crockett. He tumbled at once into his story.

"Señor Crockett, you are a good friend to my Don Luis."

"D'you mean Lew Melody?" barked out the sheriff, who was in a rough humor. "And why in the devil should I be a good friend to him—me with my right arm workin' like a rusty gate since he sent that slug of lead through my shoulder?"

Cordoba blinked at him, and then made out the note of friendly railery which had underlain the speech.

"A bullet or two will not make a difference between two American friends," said he, grinning. "But you pour out a little blood as we would pour out a little wine. Is it not so?"

"Aw," said the sheriff, "I dunno about that. What's eating you to-day?"

"Your good friend, and my son, Don Luis——"

"Hey! Has he married Juanita?"

"Not yet—the next week——"

"Then don't call him your son until after the marriage. Go on!"

"Two cruel fighting demons have come up from Mexico. It happens that they had a wicked brother who met Señor Melody a year ago, and they have kept a vengeance in their hearts all this time. Now they have come to Barneytown—they have arrived to-day——"

"Well," said Joe Crockett, "what of that?"

"What of that, señor? You do not wish the murder of your friend?"

Joe Crockett merely smiled, and there was a great deal of sourness in it. "I could go to that pair—what's their name?"

"Miguel and Cristobal Azatlan."

"I could go to 'em if they'd listen to reason and give 'em some ripping good advice to get back to Mexico while they still got whole skins. But if they've come all this way, it'll take more'n talk to turn 'em back. There ain't a thing that I can do except to let Lew Melody go ahead and put on his specialty show—which is outshooting the shooters, you might say! That's all I can do, Cordoba. How's other things on the far side of the river?"

"The drought has been a sad thing to my poor people."

"But it'll bring coin into the Cordoba pockets, eh?"

"What is a little money to me, compared with the sorrows of my friends?" said Cordoba.

And Joe Crockett did not smile. I think that if there was one man in the valley whose honesty and simplicity could be trusted without cavil, it was none other than this old Mexican money lender. But Cordoba went back across the river with his worries, and Joe Crockett came to tell me the news.

"They ain't had their lesson yet," was his way of phrasing it. "They're still drifting up the valley to get Lew Melody. Well, in a couple of days there'll be another funeral on the far side of the danger line."

I asked him what he meant, and he explained. I was shocked, naturally.

"Can't you do something?" I asked him. "Isn't it your duty to do something?"

"The trouble with all of you ministers," said Crockett, "is that you figger all men ought to do their business the

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way you do yours, and that we ought to have the same kind of business. But my job is different. Besides, I can't protect Melody unless I put him in jail. He ain't the kind that wants protecting; he's the kind that lives on trouble!"

"He is about to settle down," said I, speaking my hopes rather than my beliefs. "And after he has settled down, there will be no more trouble. When he is the father of a family——"

"The devil!" said Joe Crockett. "How come you talk nonsense like that?"

I tried to stare him down, being very much offended, but the sheriff was in a stubborn mood.

"Marriage is about the only thing that would save him, I admit," said he, "but not a marriage with a girl that he doesn't love."

I tried my best to defend Lew Melody. "What else could he do?" said I. "Juanita had risked her life and her reputation to take help to him; he had to offer to marry her to keep fools from talking about the poor girl, and they've been talking about her in spite of the marriage that's to take place. Besides, old Cordoba has treated him like a son. It was Cordoba who settled the bank robbery trouble, as you very well know."

"Why, man," said the sheriff, "I don't that Lew could have done anything else. I don't see how he could, bein' an honorable boy. Besides, that ain't my business. If I was a minister," he added with bitter point, "and had my hands mixed up in things like that all of the time, maybe I'd have been able to work out something different for him. But the way it is, he done the only straight thing. He had to offer to marry the girl."

"And why shouldn't he, for every reason?" I asked.

"She's a Mexican," said he.

"She's a lovely and a charming and a simple girl," said I with heat. "Besides, there are Mexicans as good as any people in the world!"

"I ain't arguin'," said Joe Crockett in some disgust, "I'm just sayin'!"

"Can you deny that she's lovely?"

"I deny that she's lovely like Sandy Furnival," said he.

I stamped. "Can you deny that she's wildly in love with Lew?" I asked him.

"I don't deny that. But she ain't no more wilder about him than Sandy is."

"They will have a magnificent establishment from Cordoba," said I, still talking against my better reason.

The sheriff raised his full height above me and laid a hand upon my shoulder. For the thousandth time I hated him because of his superior size.

"Look here, Tom," said he. "You know that this here is wrong. You know that he loves Sandy, and that Sandy loves him. You know that it's wrong for him to marry Juanita, no matter how much looks and how much money she's got!"

"There is reason behind everything," said I. "I would never jump at conclusions, because on the whole——"

"Aw, the devil," said Joe Crockett. "You argue like a woman!"

And he turned on his heel, rudely, and strode away from me. I was too speechless with indignation to make the least retort. I was all the more angry because I knew that he was right, and because in my heart of hearts I understood that it would have been better for me to have had his side of the argument while he took mine, as a practical man. However, there was nothing to be done about it.

I had turned this question back and forth through my mind so many times, that I ached at the mere rising of it into my thoughts. As for the rest of Barneytown, the matter had been so well known for so many days, that most of the talk had subsided. There was only a quiet expectation—I might say, an evil expectation. On the one hand, was Juanita, darkly beautiful, filled with grace, and burning with love for Lew

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Melody. On the other hand was Sandy, growing more quiet, growing more pale as the time for the marriage came nearer, but never losing her courage or her ability to keep smiling. We had made the amazing discovery that, having decided that Lew owed a great deal to the Mexican girl and that he had no other way of repaying her than through marriage, Sandy had reconciled herself completely to the affair and looked upon Juanita without the slightest bitterness.

Now, between these two was the wildest, the strongest, and the freest spirit that ever stepped in shoe leather in Barney Valley—or in the whole world, for all I know of it! Between them was Lew Melody. And the vital question was:

Will Lew Melody go through with the marriage? Or will he smash through everything, scoop Sandy up in his arms at the last minute, turn his back upon the Cordobas, and ride away to marry the girl he loves?

It was a very uneasy question to solve or to answer in any way, for the possibilities of Lew were the possibilities of a thunderbolt. Indeed, although I searched my mind a thousand times, I did not know which way he *ought* to move. On the one hand, his love was for Sandy, as the whole valley, with the exception of the Cordobas, very well knew. On the other hand, his duty and his promise was to Juanita. And the Lord in heaven alone could tell what that passionate girl would do if he deserted her—particularly after the matter had gone so far as this!

For my part, I would have been unable to advise him. I felt simply helpless, and so did every one else. But, in the meantime, the suspense grew more tremendous every day, for by a common concurrence of opinion, every one agreed that something was sure to happen before the marriage took place—and now the marriage was less than a week away!

I had barely turned from the gate where the sheriff had spoken to me, when I saw, coming up the street, the man who had filled most of my thoughts for so many weeks. It was Lew Melody himself, but so changed in his costume that I could hardly recognize him at first, in spite of the fact that Lew and only Lew could be riding on the back of the Gray Pacer.

But as that glorious creature, made of modeled silver and shining light, came gliding up the street, turning his beautiful head from side to side to observe and scorn the people he passed, I saw that his rider had transformed himself, in all respects, into a typical Mexican gallant. And I knew that the first chapter of the final drama had been already written!

CHAPTER III.

A WARNING GOES UNHEEDED.

NO one other than Lew Melody would have had the courage to conceive of such a thing, let alone the daring and the sublime scorn of public opinion to execute it. He had been famous through most of his life for the ragamuffin carelessness with which he dressed. A hat or no hat; old rusty boots, blue jeans, a flannel shirt with half the buttons missing, open at the throat, and a ragged pair of gloves—such had been the attire of the Lew Melody who had grown up terrible and careless and gay and wonderful in Barney Valley.

But behold him now, clad in the peaked sombrero of a Mexican youth, with a great band of glittering open gold work surrounding the crown—an open jacket which blazed with gold and silver lace—a shirt of brilliant blue silk—a great crimson sash with great hanging fringes about his waist, and tight trousers buttoned down his leg with immense silver conchos to ornament them. The saddle was a mass of heavy metal

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work, a staggering cost—the bridle was a jeweler's masterpiece!

But oh, how my heart sank when I saw it! For I could see, I thought, something of the things which had passed in the mind of poor Lew Melody before he made this decision.

When he saw me, he waved his hand to me and dismounted. Gray Pacer followed behind his master and stood looking over the shoulder of Lew at me with glittering eyes such as only a stallion, of all the Lord's creatures, possesses.

But here was Lew Melody, not so greatly changed that he would not do as he had always done out of respect to me—that is, take off his sombrero and stand with it in his hand while he talked. It was a little thing, I suppose, but from this famous youth, it caused a tingle to pass through my blood, without fail.

I could not help saying, at once: "Ah, Lew, you are going masquerading, are you?"

"I look like it, don't I?" said Melody. "But no—I'm simply stepping into a new name!"

"A new name?" said I.

"Yes, of course. You used to know a devil-may care fellow, called Lew Melody. I think his front name may really have been Lewis. I'm not sure. At any rate, you see another creature, now. I am a don, sir!"

And he tilted back his head and looked at me with that familiar smile—the mirth about the lips only, and the eyes made grave by the scar between his eyes which drew the flesh a little.

"Will you tell me what in the world you mean, Lewis?" said I, trying to smile in turn and making a sad job of it.

"Don Luis, if you please," said he. "Don Luis Melody—the names go with a sort of hitch, though, don't they?" And he laughed. It was an ugly sound, I thought.

"It makes no difference to me," said I. "I am your friend always, my dear boy. But other people will talk, you know!"

"Other people have always talked about me," said Lew Melody. "I wouldn't take that pleasure away from them. That's one reason I'm glad to do it. It gives them a better chance to talk. They can say that I've turned greaser, now!"

"They will not dare do that!" said I.

"Oh, I'm peaceful now," said he. "I make no more trouble. You can put me down, now, as one of the people who keep the law by force of habit. Besides, I'm afraid. When a man has been in trouble and then has to be bought out of it—it makes him afraid, you see! And Cordoba had to buy me out!"

I didn't like this sort of talk; the bitterness was too close to the surface in spite of his smiling.

He rambled on, talking rather loudly, as though he invited my neighbors to hear, and in fact, I espied the shadow of Mrs. Cheswick near her window, drinking it all in, greedily.

"But I couldn't go on being plain Lew Melody," said he. "Not while my father-in-law-to-be is spending so much money to set me up as a gentleman. I suppose that you've heard about the ranch he's bought for me?"

"Of course I've heard that. It's a splendid place, I understand. I congratulate you, Lewis."

"Don Luis," he corrected again. "Or Luis, at least. Well, it's a very fine place, of course. How many hundreds of acres there are in it, I don't know. And how much the timber alone is worth is hard to calculate. But there are three little streams running through it, so that we'll never be bothered by droughts such as this year. I'll be entirely secure there!"

There was an undercurrent of scorn and self-contempt in all of this which I pretended not to see.

"It must have cost a great deal," said I.

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"More money than I dare to guess," said Lew Melody. "But Señor Cordoba seems to think nothing of it. The fortune of that man seems to be a staggering thing. He has rivers of gold running into his coffers every day. He simply emptied a few gallons out of his reservoir, and the place was his. But that's not the end of his spending. It's hardly the beginning of it, as a matter of fact. There is the house, too! Nothing but hewn stone for that house, sir!"

"So I have heard."

"The architect is plundering him for a small fortune. He suggests nothing that does not please my father. Beautiful furniture—and a floor plan that that looks like a castle. Every day twenty more men are added to work on the place. It is a great sorrow to Señor Cordoba that the house will not be ready when the marriage is ended. But by the time we have come back from the honeymoon, the house will be open."

"And where do you go for a honeymoon?" I asked rather faintly.

"Where could the son of a rich man like Cordoba go? To Paris, of course. You surely will have guessed that, sir!"

"I suppose so," said I. "I suppose so. Why are you so infernally snappy, Lewis?"

"Ah," said he, "I don't know. Forgive me!"

It was too much for me. I could see, in this real glance at his heart, how thoroughly the boy was broken up by the whole affair. And I could not help crying: "If you feel in this way about the whole thing, in the name of heaven, break it off, Lewis!"

"Break away from Cordoba—after he has bought the ranch and built the house and after his wife has planned the wedding? Of course, I don't know what you mean!"

The misery of it closed like a wave over my head. I could understand the set and sneering expression which he wore. It was the sheerest agony.

"Juanita is to be like the fairy princess out of the storybook," he went on. "There are so many yards of lace that it seems to me all the hands in the world, working forever, could never have contrived the stuff. But that's not all. The jewels, sir! It blinds me only to think of them! It really does! Emeralds—rubies—diamonds—what would a marriage be without jewels? And then the pearls! Oh, ropes and strings and heaps of them. Why, I could talk to you about these things through the entire day."

"I wish you would, Lewis," said I gravely. "I wish you would. Because it might ease your heart a little to talk—but not out here—and no so loudly.

He laughed in my face. "Why should I care if the whole world knows about my happiness? Let the whole town gather, and I'll make a speech to them about it! The church is to be one blaze of candles—a fortune spent in the purest wax. Every saint on the calendar will have an offering. There will be so much incense that I expect to sneeze for a month afterward. And there will be flowers—yes, expect to see Barneytown drenched with flowers for that occasion."

"I'm glad it's to be such a grand affair," said I. "But not so loudly, Lewis."

"I want the people to know what is coming. The fairy princess will be the center of the show, you see. Then I step out as the prince. Don't I look like a fairy prince, sir? Give me your honest opinion!"

And he stepped back a little so that I could survey him from head to foot. He turned slowly around so that I could see the heavy brocading on the back of his short jacket.

"Yes," said I slowly, "you will be like a prince, Lewis."

"Or a bull fighter," said he, with equal gravity. "I can't tell which. However, it will be a great show. I am

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parading a little to-day so that people may know what to expect. I hope that you'll spread the news around a little."

I could not answer.

"Or tell everything to Mrs. Travis," said he. "I'm sure that she'd be glad to do a little talking."

I bit my lip. This shaft of irony had indeed struck home at the most vital spot of weakness in my dear Lydia. But the next word from him was a sudden whisper.

"Have you seen her lately, sir?"

I did not have to ask whom he meant. "I've seen her," said I.

"Is she well?" asked Lew Melody huskily.

"I think—quite well," I managed to stammer.

"I rode out like a thief in the night," said Melody, "and I peeked through the window at her. I thought she was a little pale. But she is not ill?"

"No, Lewis, not ill."

"Sometimes I wonder——" he began, and then stopped.

I did not ask him to continue, but, as quickly as I could, I changed the subject back to himself.

"A year ago you fought with a Mexican named Azatlan."

"Did I?" said he carelessly. "Yes, I think I did. A dog who tried to knife me in the back."

"You killed him, Lewis."

"I'm glad I was lucky enough to!"

"Two of his brothers are across the danger line, waiting to find you. Will you promise me to be careful?"

"Careful of the life of the son of Señor Cordoba, the rich money lender?" said he. "Can you ask me such a question? If I did not trouble about myself, I should at least have to take care of such clothes as these, should I not?"

But when he leaped onto the back of Gray Pacer, the direction in which he rode was straight back toward the river, and I knew, then, how well he would heed my warning!

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE CANTINA.

HE was not two blocks down the street when a rider on a foaming horse rushed up to him.

"Don Luis!"

"Well?"

"I come from Señor Cordoba!"

"Heaven be with him," said Lew Melody in solemn mockery.

"He sends me to warn you that two men——"

"Are playing mumble-the-peg?"

"Are in Barneytown hunting for you—brothers of——"

"I know them," said Melody, "if they look like their third brother."

"You have heard, then?" said the fellow, much disappointed.

"I am glad to hear it over again, however," said Melody. And he gave the man a piece of gold.

"You are to ride straight back to the house of Señor Cordoba," said the messenger.

"I am? Is that the order?" asked Melody, swallowing a lump of scorn in his throat.

"The señor begs you to come at once!"

"I shall do my best," said Luis. "But tell Señor Cordoba that the Gray Pacer has turned lame and that I may have to go slowly on the way home!"

The other eyed the flawless beauty of the stallion. "Ah, well, señor," said he, flashing a glance of admiration at the calm face of Melody, "I trust that fortune will be with you again. But they are known men, both of them."

"Which means that they are known scoundrels, eh?"

"By all means!"

"Where were they last seen?"

"In a place where—you must not go, señor. Those are my orders."

"You are not telling me—it is a bird in the air," said Melody, and gave him another heavy yellow coin.

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The other bit his lip, looked guiltily askance, and then: "In the old saloon——"

"Which Señora Alicia keeps?"

"Yes."

"A thousand thanks!"

And the Gray Pacer turned into a flash of silver as it shot down the street, and carried Lew Melody over the staggering bridge which arched the Barney River, and across the danger line into the disheveled Mexican quarter. There he still shot forward at a round gait—the swimming pace which only a race horse could follow at full gallop. The dust cloud which he raised was towering far behind when the Pacer was stopped in front of a low-fronted dobe building which was set back behind an open shed in which horses could be tethered in the shade and where they could be watered. Here Melody left his animal and stalked straight to the door of the cantina.

At the door, he paused. The very suddenness of his approach had made it impossible for two or three ragged peons who were watching him askance with eyes of awe and suspicion, to carry warning of his coming into the interior. As he listened, he could hear a quick humming of gay voices. But there was no conversation which he found important, so he threw open the door and stepped in. He found half a dozen men seated at tables in the big room. At the back of the room, Señora Alicia's assistant was keeping bank while two men shook dice against the house. Prohibition had not fallen heavily upon this cantina. For though the good lady's husband had been shot down, yet she chose to open the same place, and it was said that there was more evil connected with the place during her regime than there had ever been in the days of her fat husband.

She was behind the bar, and it was from her that a warning hiss came the instant that Lew Melody appeared. He remained by the door, for a moment, looking calmly from one face to another. At the hiss of the señora, every eye had glanced up with a sharp flash at him, and every eye had looked down again with an equal haste, as though each feared a discovery.

So he went to the bar. It was after the American style, with a great mirror extending down the wall. Melody turned his back upon the room and leaned an elbow on the bar. He asked for soda water, and while the señora opened the bottle, she said:

"You are drinking with care, to-day, Señor Melody."

"I always drink with care in hot weather," said Melody. "It is a wise man's way. Liquor heats the brain—and makes a shaky hand. It is one thing to stumble with the tongue, is it not, and quite another to stumble with the hand?"

She smiled with hate as she put glass and bottle before him; a certain dear cousin of the señora's had fallen with the accurately flung knife of Melody sticking in his throat. That was a full five years before, but it was not hard for her to remember. There had been other actions since that time to keep her memory refreshed.

Now one of the men at the tables stealthily rose, reaching a hand behind him as he did so, until he saw his clear image rising, also, in the broad, polished surface of the mirror behind the bar. Señor Melody could see that reflection, if he were not blind, and no one had ever suspected him of dull eyes. The man sat down again, with suddenness!

"I saw the pretty señorita this morning," muttered old Alicia with a malicious side glance at Melody.

"But have you seen no handsome men?" said Melody casually. "I have heard that two fine fellows came to Barneytown this morning. You have not seen them, of course?"

"I cannot tell what you mean," said

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she, looking down steadfastly, nevertheless.

"You could not, of course," answered he, smilingly.

He turned his back upon her suddenly and faced the rest of the room.

Señora Alicia took advantage of this respite to allow her face to wrinkle with hate until her yellow fangs showed.

"Do you hear me, my dear friends?" said Melody.

Not a head was lifted in response.

"I speak to you, among the rest," said Melody. "I speak to you with the black mustaches—not much of them—like the whiskers of a Chinaman! Do you hear me?"

I do not excuse the language of Lew Melody; but other things must be taken into consideration—all that was burning in his mind on this day, and a thousand agonies in his heart—and, in addition, the frightful odds which he was facing at this moment. For who could tell, for instance, if the old witch behind the bar might not have the courage to make her strength equal her hate and catch up a knife to plunge it in the back of Melody as he turned from her? Perhaps that very thought was in her mind, helping to wrinkle her face into a caricature of humanity. Yet his easy poise disconcerted her. He seemed so sure of himself that I presume she felt the young demon had eyes in the back of his head, capable of watching her every moment of the time.

In the meantime, the Mexican who had been addressed in this cruel manner, lifted his head, perforce. He was an ugly chap of middle age, with a heavily marked face, and mustaches which consisted of a few black bristles, just as Melody had described them. He stared at Melody, now, with a brutal fury; but though he set his teeth, he did not speak a word.

"Good," said Melody. "Now continue to look at me, if you please. This gold-laced jacket is worth a glance, is it not? In the meantime, I wish to speak, and I wish you, and the others, to hear."

No other heads were turned toward him, but a little shudder ran through that room. They pretended to go on with their card game, and with their dicing, but not a sound was made, and those bent heads were attending with a religious ardor to every syllable that Lew Melody had to say.

"I have learned," said he, "of two brave men who have come to our town from Mexico, the land of warriors."

He paused to tilt back his head and smile as he said this. And then he repeated, turning the words slowly over his tongue: "From Mexico—the nation of warriors—two brave hearts have ridden up the north trail until they have come to Barneytown. And they carry the name of Azatlan!"

Here he paused and leaned forward a little, scanning every face in that room with a tigerish intentness; but every man started, and one no more than another. A shadow of disappointment passed over the face of Melody, and he went on:

"They came to inquire after another gentleman who rode to this town a year ago. His name, also, was Azatlan. He was, in fact, their brother. And it occurs to me that perhaps they may be hunting for this man. Do you not think so, señor?"

The man with the bristling mustaches made no answer.

"Speak, rat!" said Melody.

It brought a savage convulsion of rage to the features of him of the meager mustaches; for an instant it seemed that he would leap from his chair and fling himself at the throat of his tormentor. But he recovered himself at once.

"I cannot tell," muttered he, in an inaudible voice.

"You cannot tell?" echoed Melody. "Ah, well, still I believe that that is why they have come. And that is why I have ridden down to the cantina of my

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dear friend, the Señora Alicia. We are old friends, are we not, señora?"

A gasping snarl was her only answer.

"I have come to my friend's house in the hope that I might find them here, because I wish to tell them what became of the other Azatlan. Is there no one among you by that name?"

Not a head stirred, not a voice spoke.

"Then hear me and repeat it to the two good brothers: Pedro Azatlan has left this weary world. Do you understand? I, who tell you, know. Because it was my privilege to open the door for him. And I showed him through into his new life. I know that the two brave brothers will be interested. Tell them, also, that I called here in the hope of having a pleasant word with them—about their brother's journey."

He tossed off his soda and then backed to the door.

"Adios, amigos!"

And he was gone.

CHAPTER V.

RETURNING TO THE CORDOBAS.

IF you think that Lew Melody was exceedingly brutal in this matter, I must explain a little: First, that he had recognized one of the precious pair by a resemblance to the brute face of the man he had killed the year before. For, the moment he had left the cantina, there was a great bustle and stir behind him, and the middle-aged man with the bristling mustaches, who was none other than Cristobal Azatlan, rushed from his chair toward the door like a bull. A taller and younger man sprang after him, overtook him, and dragged him back.

"No, brother," said he. "You were wise not to draw a knife or a gun. It was far better to let him go. We have not come here to fight like two fools, eager to throw our lives away. We have come here only to exact a vengeance, which is a holy thing, is it not?"

"Ah, gasped out Cristobal, well-nigh strangled with rage and with shame, "God must have sustained me, for otherwise I should not have been able to control myself. I should have rushed at him and torn him to pieces. Ah, Miguel, did you not hear it? It was he who opened the door, and sent our brother out of this life. Ah, dog of a gringo! Ah, the devil take and burn him little by little, forever! It must be to-day, Miguel—or I shall die! There is a fire in me! I shall die of hate if I do not kill him to-day!"

They led him back to a chair. Señora Alicia, full of solicitude, brought wine.

"Do not think, Señor Azatlan, that we suspect your brave heart. But is the bull as wise as the wild cat? No, no! It is fatal to rush at this Don Luis. He is a devil with ten hands, and each hand strikes deadly blows. I—your friend, who stand now before you—I have seen three bold and strong men rush upon him in this place. And that was in long years ago, when he was still a boy. Two of those men we kept in bed until their wounds healed slowly. And the third man was buried. It was sad and terrible. But all the men of the valley know that what I say is only the truth. It is the small shadow of the truth. Believe me, there is no shame for you. Tell him, amigos, if I have lied?"

Others came around Cristobal. It was to congratulate him for the patience with which he had endured the dreadful baiting of Don Luis.

"But it delivers him into your hands," said they. Before, he thought he knew your face, and he was right. But now he cannot be sure that you are Pedro's brother. He is already a dead man, and you and Miguel will succeed where so many have failed. But do not meet him face to face. It is deadly and unescapable! It is better to face poison. He works by enchantment!"

In this manner they soothed the in-

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jured pride of Cristobal, and more wine was poured for them, but not too much. For the advice of Melody himself was still in their ears—a stumbling tongue is bad, but a stumbling hand is a fatal disaster.

Lew Melody had ridden slowly away from the cantina, with his head turned over his shoulder, for he half expected that some maddened man might lurch out through the door, in the hope of putting a bullet in the back of the rider; for such an eager enemy, Melody was prepared. I myself have seen him whirl in the saddle while galloping at full speed and split the head of a jack rabbit with his bullet!

However, his skill had been known for eight years in the valley; men shunned him as they were fabled to have shunned the swords of Tristram and Lamorak and Lancelot in the old days of King Arthur. And I have often wondered if the heroes of the days of armor were not much like this man? Not bulky giants, as we are so apt to imagine them, but graceful, agile, sure-handed men, with quick feet and unerring eyes. For it is not hard for my imagination to dress Lew Melody from head to foot in complete mail and set in his hand a long lance with a pennon fluttering from the base of its point.

At any rate, having made sure that there was to be no sudden rushing out against him, he let the Gray Pacer glide away through the dusty streets until he came to the house of the money lender. There he rode into the court and gave the reins of the stallion to a servant. He entered by the back stairs—down which Juanita had told him she had gone when she stole out through the night to carry him a wealth of jewels and so buy his safety from the hand of the law. Melody, going slowly up the stairs, could picture her descending, frightened of every whisper through the old house, clad in her man's clothes, with her hair shorn to disguise her the better.

Well, she was a soul of fire! How little he had expected such a strength in this girl! How little he knew her—or any woman, for that matter!

But, in the meantime, the adventure which was just behind him had so soothed his soul, and the thought of the courage of Juanita had so raised his heart, that he came into the living rooms of the old house with the vital picture of Sandy, which had never left his mind, now grown dim and pale. As for Señor Cordoba and his wife, I don't suppose that they were able to notice anything except the prime fact that "Don Luis" had come back to them, and that he was safe in body. But Juanita saw something more. A haunted look had begun to come upon the face of this girl in the last days—almost since a date for her wedding with Lew Melody was announced. Not that she suspected the feeling of Lew toward Sandy; for though she had known about that affair, she considered it more or less as a sort of foolish fling on the part of Lew Melody. His real love was for her, and for her only, she told herself. And yet she knew that there was a shadow in the soul of Melody. She tried with all her might to find what that shadow might be, but she could not. And she had no one with whom she could talk this thing over.

At last, she struck upon a solution, and with the passing of every day, she felt that she must indeed have struck the truth. The shadow in the mind of Lew Melody was old Cordoba himself. For was not Melody the fiery soul of pride, and was not this father of hers no more than a peon? This, she told herself sadly, was the cause behind the gloom which she felt in Melody, though her mother and father seemed unable to detect anything wrong in him.

At this very moment, as he came in, singing and tossing his hat at a chair, she found his eye so lighted and his head so high that she could have cried

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out with joy. It was like the Lew Melody she had known of old.

"Did no messenger come to you from me?" cried Cordoba, when he saw the young American.

"Yes."

"Ah, you were so long—I had a fear that—well, here you are; and you are safe! Luis, you must not move from the house for a few days, until I have found a way of disposing of—never mind!"

"Of Miguel and Cristobal Azatlan? Do you mean them?" asked Lew Melody.

"The devil has told you their names!" cried poor Cordoba. "How have you learned?"

"I have been to see them!"

"You!" cried all three, frozen with astonishment and with dread.

"But I could only find one," said Melody, hastening to relieve their minds of all dread. "I found only one—that is, only one that I could recognize, and there was no bloodshed—nothing but words. I scolded him, my dear friends, and then I came back to you."

"Were there others there?" asked Cordoba.

"There were; and that's why I tell you about it, because I know that you'd hear very soon whether I spoke or not. But there is no harm done."

"Except that you have insulted one of them in public. And now he cannot exist in happiness until he has—ah, well, Luis, if you were not so terrible, we would not love you so much, I suppose. But now you must not stir out of the house. Promise me that, until I have had a chance to find these men and deal with them?"

"But how would you deal with them?" asked Lew Melody.

The money lender winked broadly at him. "There are ways!" said he.

"You will bribe him to leave the valley?" asked Lew. "But they would come back again. You cannot handle such nettles with a light touch; you must crush them. Leave them to me. It is all in the knack of the thing—very simple, and no danger. I only talk of it to-day, because I know that you will worry."

He was stopped by the expression of Cordoba. The poor man was in a complete panic. It had been one thing to hear of the fierce exploits of this youth, when he was no more than a gay visitor in the house of Cordoba now and again; but as the future husband of Juanita—yes, with that marriage barely around the corner of to-morrow, so to speak, it was absolutely necessary that they should find some means of curbing this creature of fire. But how put a harness on a comet? With despair, then, and with love, and with a sort of futile rage, the money lender gazed at the youngster. Then he turned to his wife.

"Speak to him!" he entreated.

The señora had watched all of this scene with a keen and patient eye, with an interest neither feminine nor masculine; nothing existed in her except the mother afraid for her daughter's happiness, and in this moment she was seeing terrible ordeals in the long years which stretched ahead for Juanita if she married such a man. And, by a sort of premonition, a foreknowledge, she knew that this marriage should not be. So she made no answer to her frantic husband.

It was Juanita who spoke, and in such a tone as neither her father nor her mother had ever heard from her before.

She simply said: "We have talked too much of what Luis should do. I suppose that he'll decide for himself in the end!"

It was as though she had said: "What are we, that we should prescribe?"

So that matter ended for the moment, but a strange chill had come over the household and would not leave them. They sat about fumbling for something

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to say, or something to do, conscious that the silence was more tense every instant, but unable to murmur a word. And Lew Melody? For the first time, really, he saw that in marrying Juanita he would be marrying her father and her mother also. They would become a part of his family and of his life, and he would be held by three anchors, and not one.

But three anchors make a moveless ship—and he was Lew Melody!

CHAPTER VI.

A LOAN IS SUGGESTED.

IT was Cordoba himself who, at last, broke the silence that had gathered so heavily in the room. It seemed as though serious thoughts rolled very easily off his fat, round back; or perhaps it was the sense of his own trouble that brought to his mind the trouble of another.

He said suddenly: "It is the end of that poor Señor Furnival!"

The glance of Juanita flashed whip-like to the face of Lew Melody; if she spoke never of the passion which had taken her lover from her side to that of Sandy Furnival, not so many weeks before, it was not because she did not think of it constantly. Think she did, and now her look probed at the face of Lew Melody. If it had been I, she would have surprised me, I know, in the midst of an expression of dismay which would have told a great deal. But I have noticed that men who are quick with their hands are, also, usually quick with their minds. So that the instant that Lew heard that word, he felt the prick of the spur and then banished all semblance of pain from his face and presented an unruffled brow to Juanita's searching eyes. The señora, too, had looked askance at him; but she discovered no more than did her daughter.

"What's happened to Furnival?" asked Melody, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"He is sick?" asked Juanita.

"He is sick in the purse," said the money lender, and he could not help smiling a little when he thought of his own comfortable thousands in the bank.

"That's odd," said Melody cheerfully, "because he seemed to be a thrifty man."

"Ah, yes, very thrifty," said the money lender. "But these thrifty men sometimes forget one little thing—cash, cash, cash! That is it!" He rubbed his hands together and chuckled with self-satisfaction.

"But he has a good ranch," said Lew.

"So-so. It is a good ranch, stocked with good cattle. But there is a mortgage, eh?"

"It is worth more than the mortgage, surely!" said the señora. "I have seen that place. It is good."

"Buying and selling," said the man of money, "is a beautiful thing. Do you know what the generals say? There is a time to fight and a time not to fight. And there is also a time to sell and a time to buy. Well, my children, this is not the time for Señor Furnival to sell. It is very wrong! But he needs cash—cash—cash!"

"The bank——" began the señora.

"It is the bank that holds the mortgage. It is the bank that wants the ranch. You see how beautiful it is?"

"Is the Barneytown bank the only one in the valley?"

"They are all allies," said Cordoba. "And the Barneytown bank has said to the others: Let us alone. We want this thing. Another time, we will keep our hands off when you wish a thing. So it goes, do you see? Señor Furnival gets no money; he must sell; and the bank is the buyer—oh, very cheap! Because no one outside of the banks have the cash—not one except Cordoba!"

"Then why does he not come to you?" asked the wife.

"Who can tell?" said Cordoba, with a grin of satisfaction. "To some, I am only a greaser dog!"

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"Father!" cried Juanita, turning crimson.

"Oh, do not look at Luis," said the money lender. "He knows what fools say of me! But when Furnival does not come to me, should I go to him?"

Juanita glanced again at Lew Melody; he was merely rolling one of his incessant cigarettes, and his face was as calm as the face of a sphinx.

"Ah, Luis," said the girl, "can you be so heartless, when those people were once your friends? Can you see them go down to a great poverty, perhaps, when a word from you would persuade my father?"

Heaven can tell how the heart of Lew Melody must have leaped when he heard this suggestion, but he knew his part, and he merely said: "They are nothing to me. Let these business men take care of their business. Why should your father lose money to help this rancher?"

"Ah, well," said Cordoba, cocking his head upon one side as another phase of the thing entered his mind. "It would be a good loan. It would be—let me see—twelve—perhaps fifteen thousand dollars. One cannot place such loans—at a right interest—every day. But—should I go to him? No. I would lose two per cent simply by asking him for his business. That would be a fool's trick. I am growing old; but I have not grown foolish. No, no!"

I have always seen a fate in this thing—that Juanita should have urged on a matter which ended in her own destruction. But at that moment there was nothing in her saving a great gentleness. And when she looked at Lew Melody and considered her great happiness, she had a consuming pity for all who might be sad in this world.

She said: "Let Luis go to them and talk for you. It would be business from you; it would seem mere friendship from him!"

The money lender, not displeased, grinned broadly upon his wife. "Is she not my daughter?" said he. "Yes, and she has a head. She has understanding, I tell you! Well, Luis, will you go to him from me? Will you go to him as a friend?"

I suppose that Lew Melody felt this thing was a gift from heaven, but he pretended to be disinclined.

"It is a long ride, and a hot day," said he. "I should think that a letter would do well enough."

"Luis!" cried Juanita. "Do you mean it?"

"Well," said he, "will it please you if I go?"

"Ah, yes!"

"These good people," said the artful Melody, with a sigh, "make us bad ones work hard to please them. I'll ride to the Furnival ranch if you wish, Juanita."

"Dear Luis!"

"Tush!" said the money lender. "This may be a good business stroke for me. But look—because it is the wish of Juanita, I shall be generous. There happens to be much money lying idle in my safe. Why should it not work? So I will give them a banker's rate—at six per cent. Now, there is generosity, Luis!"

"Foolish generosity!" said Melody.

"Well, I shall be soft-hearted for once. But go quickly, Luis. I am eager to learn what he says. Unless he is a madman—go quickly! There is much money idle in my safe! Tell him—it can be arranged by mail, if he cannot take this trip to see me."

It was in this manner that Melody was persuaded to do the thing which lay the nearest to his heart—by the girl and by her father. In the light of things to come, you will see if this was not the work of a controlling Providence which had a care for the sorrows of poor Sandy Furnival.

So, sauntering idly, for fear lest haste on his part might excite the suspicions of the Cordobas, after all, Lew Melody

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went down to the street to the Gray Pacer, and there he found a down-headed roan mustang with both ears dropping lazily forward, enjoying a sun bath. And, in the meager shadow of his neck, sitting cross-legged in the dust, his back reclining against the forelegs of the little beast, sat a bareheaded boy of fifteen with a young-old face—a philosopher above, a young satyr below. He was blowing on a harmonica, his eyes half closed in enjoyment of the weird strains which he brought forth.

"Slim!" said Lew Melody, and ran for him.

But Slim held up one restraining hand. "Listen here," said Slim, with a corner of the instrument still in his mouth. "If this ain't swell harmony, I'm a goat!" And he repeated the last strain.

"You'll be a violinist," said Lew Melody. "That's fine!"

At this, a gleam of satisfaction crossed the features of the ragged, dusty boy. He stood up and held out his hand.

"Hello, Lew," said he. "How's things?"

"Where the devil have you been?" asked Lew Melody. "And why haven't I heard from you? And what became of the last suit of clothes I got for you?"

"I was rollin' the bones with Arkansas Joe down to El Paso," said the boy, "and he had the dog-gonedest run of luck that you ever seen. He got his point five times runnin', and when I doubled my bets and stakes my new clothes along with the rest of my pile, darned if he didn't crap and get the whole lot! That was luck! What?"

"That was luck," grinned Lew Melody. He thrust a forefinger into the lean paunch of the boy. "When did you eat last, Slim?"

"Leave me be!" said Slim angrily. "My last meal was a fine breakfast."

"What did you have?"

"Roast chicken," said Slim. "Roast chicken done brown, and roast potaters in the ashes, and coffee that would make you roll your eyes!"

"That sounds enough," said Melody. "Where did you swipe the chickens?"

"Aw, down the line."

"When was it? Yesterday?"

"Naw. The day before."

"Here's a ten-spot. Blow yourself to a real meal again."

"Thanks," said Slim, stowing the coin with a dexterous palm.

"Why did you fade away, Slim? I thought that you'd stay around with me for a while."

"A hand-out once in a while is all right," declared Slim, "but mooching steady all the time is beggin'. D'you think that I'd be a beggar, Lew?"

"Of course not. How have you been making any money, though? Riding herd a little?"

"Work," explained Slim, "don't agree with me none. It sort of riles up my blood and gets my head to achin'. When I start to workin' I begin to see pictures, and all the pictures is of some place where I ain't. Funny, ain't it?"

"Very queer," said Lew. "But what brought you back just now?"

"I thought I'd blow in for the wedding and the big eats. There'll be big eats, I guess?"

"Oh, yes. More than you can hold."

"I dunno," said Slim. "When I lay myself out to really eat, I can wrap myself around a whole grocery store, pretty near." He stepped closer to Melody. "A bo down the line," said he, "told me about a couple of birds that come up to scalp you. Name of Azatlan. They ought to be in Barneytown right now."

"I've seen one of them," said Lew Melody. "But thanks for letting me know. That's friendly, Slim."

"Aw, it ain't nothin'," said Slim. "Speakin' personal, I been sort of achin' for a scrap. I been practicin' with this right along. Watch!"

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With a lightning gesture he conjured a revolver from his clothes and made it disappear on the opposite side of his body. There had been hardly more than a flash of steel in the sun.

"Fine," said Melody. "That's the real stuff. How much time every day?"

"Two or three hours," said Slim. "And then another hour, pullin' and shooting quick." He added with a sigh: "But I ain't so very sure of my stuff yet, Lew. Well, it's comin', though. I remember what you taught me, pretty well. But I get to pulling with the forefinger instead of squeezing with the whole hand, the way you said!"

So, when Lew Melody slipped into the saddle on the great, gray stallion, the boy jumped onto the back of the roan mustang and they started off together, the pacer sliding along like flowing water, and the mustang pounding hard to keep up. They twisted out through the narrow streets of the Mexican quarter of Barneytown, and across the staggering old bridge across the river, and so on through the broader streets of the eastern town. Then up the hills beyond toward the Furnival ranch they went, until the sharply flashing eyes of the boy detected something moving in a course parallel with theirs, on the farther side of the hill up which they rode that moment.

"Lew," said he, "there's a slick bird trailin' us on the far side of the hill!"

CHAPTER VII.

LEW RIDES TO THE FURNIVAL RANCH.

"DID you have a glimpse of him?"

"Only the peak of a hat"

"Broad or sharp?"

"A Mexican peak, Lew. Might it be——"

"I'll see," said Lew Melody, and, twitching the stallion to the right, he turned the fine creature into a silver flash of light that drove up the hillside, leaped a fence on the crest, and shot on like a winged thing floating near the ground, to the farther side of the hill, with poor Slim flogging its best speed out of the mustang but falling more and more hopelessly to the rear with every stride.

So sudden was that charge that the rider on the farther hillside was taken quite from the rear and most wholly by surprise. When he jerked his head around, it was only to see Lew Melody already almost upon him and within point-blank range for pistol shooting.

At that range, men took no liberties with Lew Melody, from the Rio Grande to the Cascade Mountains. His work was too swift and far too sure for any comfort. So the man, a lean-faced individual with very long, Indian-straight black hair that jutted out beneath the band of his hat, stopped his horse and waited for Melody to come up. The Gray Pacer was brought to a swerving halt that made him face the other directly. Melody hooked a thumb over his shoulders.

"The road is yonder," said he. "There is no trail here, my friend." He spoke in Spanish, and the other answered sullenly:

"I ride where I choose to ride, señor."

"We do not find men by riding cross-country for them," said Melody. "When we wish to meet them, we ride down the roads. Or, better still, we go to their houses and call them to the door and say: 'Defend yourself!'"

"Señor!" exclaimed the Mexican, with a glitter of danger in his eyes.

"Yes, señor," said Melody. "Yes, Miguel Azatlan!"

The guess struck home so sharply, that the other turned a pale yellow with the shock of it.

"You have my name, then?" muttered he.

"I have your name," said Melody. "But you are not a full blood brother to those bull-faced fools—Pedro and Cristobal. You are not?"

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"Their father was my father," said the other, more sullen than ever, but more afraid than sullen.

"You have come up here to talk with me concerning the death of Pedro a year ago?" asked Melody.

"I did not say so."

"But I know your thoughts. It must be that we have mutual friends. And now look around you, Miguel. Here are open fields. There is no one near us except the boy, yonder, and he will report the matter fairly and say that it was a fair fight, no matter which of us drops. Why should you not say what you have to say now?"

"I do not know what you mean," said Miguel, a little more yellow than ever. "I have nothing to say."

"Not even six words?" asked Melody contemptuously. And he pointed to the holster at the hip of the Mexican. But Azatlan regarded him in a glowering silence.

"Very well," said Melody. "It is to be in the dark, then, after all." And, turning his horse fairly around, he presented his back to the Mexican and rode away.

At this tempting target, Azatlan gripped his revolver butt. But still his hand brought it only half out. There was something so light in the carriage of Melody, so suggestive of an animal readiness to whirl and shoot and not miss, that he changed his mind and jammed the gun back into the leather cover.

At the hilltop, Slim rejoined his friend, grinning broadly. "I didn't hear nothin'," said Slim, "but I seen plenty. That sap is gunna dream about you, Lew!"

"The rat is a night worker, it seems," said Lew Melody. "He'll try his hand with me when the lights are out. Over yonder is the Furnival ranch, kid. I have to go there by myself. I suppose that you won't be lonely?"

"Me? I keep my company with me," said Slim, and, turning the mustang under the shade of a tree, he slid off and lay flat in the pale-brown grass; the outlandish strains of the harmonica followed Lew Melody down the road a step or two.

He went straight up to the ranch house, but when he rapped and waited, his heart in his mouth, it was not the familiar light step of Sandy Furnival that came up to the door, but a trailing noise of slippers. The Chinese cook opened to Lew.

From the pidgin English of the cook, Melody learned that Furnival was superintending the building of a stack of straw behind the winter sheds for the cattle. So, to the sheds went Lew and found Furnival himself on top of the stack, taking two corners of the great square stack while a hired man labored on the other side of the rising pyramid, and a Jackson fork dumped a quarter of a wagon load at a time on top of the pile. It was well sun faded, this straw, and it rose, now, like a rough mound of ivory against a pale sky. On top, half obscured through the smoke of chaff and dust, Lew saw the grim face of Furnival, set with labor and enjoying his task. He thought it characteristic of the man that, with ruin just around the corner of his life, Furnival should be carrying on the routine work of the ranch with such methodical pains.

A little shudder passed through the body of Lew Melody and set all his lean muscles twitching. For the only thing in the world that he feared, I am sorry to say, was hard work!

The business ended as he approached. The derrick boy turned to stare at him; the teamster on top of his load paused with the ponderous Jackson fork raised in his hands; and Furnival himself advanced to the edge of the stack and shouted down:

"What you want, Melody?"

"I want to talk to you."

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"About what?" asked Furnival coldly.

It was very irritating to Lew Melody. He came there intent upon being his mildest self, but when one wishes to have a quiet bull terrier, it is not well to bring it near to a growling dog.

"About your own business," snapped out Lew, "if that interests you."

Now, Furnival was a somber fellow, and I suppose that of all the people in the world, the one he was least fond of was this tall, graceful, handsome young man who sat on the back of the famous Gray Pacer and looked up to him from beneath a gaudy Mexican sombrero. However, after he had paused for a moment, he seemed to decide that it would be better to talk than to explode. So he waded over the loose top of the stack, gripped a derrick rope, and slid down.

He came to Melody, wiping the perspiration and the dust out of his eyes and shouting over his shoulder: "Keep on! This ain't no half holiday!"

The derrick-horse driver came to life with a start, the big Jackson fork was fixed and then went groaning up into the air with its dripping load of straw.

Melody was now standing at the head of the stallion.

"What'll you have?" asked Furnival.

"You're in trouble," said Melody, with an equal sharpness.

"I ain't called for a doctor," said the rancher.

"You're about to be broken up small," said Lew, as coldly as ever. "And you know it."

"What might that have to do with you?"

"I haven't come here for your sake. I suppose that you can guess that."

"We ain't gunna argue that point," said Furnival darkly. "Now lemme hear what you got to say. I'm a busy man."

"I've come to find out what money you need to float you through," said Lew Melody, "and offer you a loan——"

I suppose it was a staggering blow to the rancher. In his hard life, he had never received gifts, he had never taken help. But he had moiled and toiled his way to the possession of all that he owned. Help from any one would have been an absolute novelty to him. But help from a man like Melody, whom he considered an enemy, was very strange!

If he felt a shock of surprise at first, it was followed at once by a total suspicion. Things which are too good cannot be real.

"*You* want to offer me a loan?" he asked gravely.

"From Cordoba."

"Ah," grunted Furnival. "From the greaser, eh?"

It was a rough and a pointless insult —seeing that he and the entire valley knew that Lew Melody was contracted to the daughter of the Mexican.

But if the eye of Melody turned to fire, he controlled his anger at once. And Furnival, seeing that effort at self-control, marveled more than ever. For certainly Lew had no saintly repute for patience.

"From Cordoba," said Melody coldly. "I suppose that money from him would help you as much as money from any one?"

"I dunno," muttered Furnival, still peering intently at the younger man to make out some hidden meaning. "I dunno that I foller your drift, son."

"Open your eyes, then, and look sharp. Is there anything that you can't understand? The bank has cornered you——"

"How did you find that out?"

"From Cordoba."

"And now Cordoba wants to corner me the same way? No, Melody; if I'm gunna go bust, I'll let white robbers pick my bones. Thank you!"

A veritable saint would have begun to show some emotion by this time, I believe. As for Lew Melody, he was in a white heat.

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"I'm making the offer for the last time!" he cried. "Will you take Cordoba's money at six per cent interest, or will you not?"

CHAPTER VIII.

EXQUISITE AGONY.

IT was the crowning shock to Furnival. Naturally it was not the first time he had taken a loan; that was the direct cause of his downfall. But when a rancher borrows, he usually pays very dearly for it. The cattle business is too uncertain to make banks lend gladly. A famine season may ruin the most prosperous rancher; and so the rates run high on cattle money. Now, of all times, Furnival having his back against the wall, money at six per cent was like money donated freely. He glared at Melody, hunting for the joke behind this suggestion, but when he found the eye of the younger man bright and steady, he looked wildly around him, then back again to this minister of grace.

"Lew," said he finally, "this is a funny thing that you're talkin' about. I'm about down and done for. I suppose that you ain't meaning it when you talk six per cent?"

"Exactly that! You can have what you want at that rate."

"Young feller," said Furnival with a rising voice, "d'you know what I'm in the hole?"

"Only vaguely."

"I need eighteen thousand dollars before I can hold up my head!"

"Eighteen thousand dollars," said Lew Melody, "is exactly what you may have!" He added: "Or call it twenty thousand, which will leave you some spare money in the bank to work on."

The sun was burning hot, but Furnival took off his hat and exposed his face as though to a cooling breeze.

"Say it once more—slow and careful!" said he.

And Lew Melody repeated the offer.

"But why in Heaven's name will he do it?" cried the rancher.

"He knows that your ranch is worth it."

"Ay—it is!" exclaimed Furnival. "And more, too. And if I can meet the bank, I'll be so far ahead by the end of the season that I could pay off the whole eighteen thousand. I got my hands on gold—a regular mine—everything is busting my way—except for cash, and the lack of cash was killing me! But now—why, I'd be free, Melody!"

"Cordoba is not a fool," said Lew. "He wouldn't lend the money if he didn't know that you were worth it."

"It ain't him," said Furnival. "It's you, Melody, that's doin' this for me!"

"I tell you, it's not, Furnival. I give you my word——"

"You're lyin' to me," snapped out the rancher. "It's you that persuaded him. Whoever heard tell of a money lender sending out beggin' to make a loan—and at six per cent! Why, it's not more than charity, Melody!"

Nothing else could have torn through the outer shell of his strength so effectually, for there was nothing else that Furnival so understood as he understood money and money matters. This was an eloquence of dollars and cents that went to his soul.

And, while Lew Melody persisted that there was no charity in it, and that it was a matter of the sheerest business, Furnival took him by the arm and said: "We're gunna walk into the house where we can talk more comfortable."

He fairly dragged Lew to the house and up the steps of the veranda through the door. The same door where, not long before, he had met Lew with a shotgun in his hands and a sharp command never to show his face again in the Furnival house. But that was forgotten, now. No, as they entered the living room, he turned about and gripped the hand of Melody.

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"I said once that I'd never see you inside my house again, Lew. Well, I was a fool. I didn't know you. I was blind to you! But when a man gives back good for bad, the way you're doin' now—why, it makes me want to stand on top of the house and talk to the world about it."

"You'll not tell a soul," said Melody.

"But I shall."

"Furnival, you'd embarrass me."

"Hey, Sandy!"

"For Heaven's sake!" breathed Lew, when he heard the name of the girl he loved.

And then her sweet voice from the upper part of the house made answer, and he heard the quick, light step come through the upper hall.

"I can't stay. You mustn't tell her about it," said Lew, completely miserable. "I'm going now. Let me go, Furnival!"

"Let you go? I'll see you damned first!" He laid a gigantic grip upon the arm of Furnival. "Hey, Sandy! Will you hurry up?"

Sandy came in a breathless whirl to the open door, and there she stopped short and threw her hand up before her face. For it was a cruel thing to bring her so suddenly into sight of the man she loved.

But Furnival was in the midst of a speech-making effort, the first in his life, and the glow of his enthusiasm did not permit him to see the pain and the white shock in the face of his daughter.

"I dragged Lew into the house," said the rancher, "because you got the lingo to talk right to him, and I ain't! I dragged him in here first to tell you that he's saved us, Sandy. Why he done it, I dunno, except that he's naturally white. But here's the work of my life—this here house—that chair and that table—and everything beyond that window, from the straw to the cows—the whole work of my life was gunna go up in smoke, Sandy. And now Lew comes in to save me, after I've treated him like a mangy dog. I say that it warms my heart!"

"No, Sandy," broke in Lew Melody. "I have no money. I could not do it. It is the money of Cordoba, and he deserves the praise."

"You hear him?" laughed the rancher, swelling with joy. "Why, he's modest, too. Darned if I ain't seein' him for the first time. Sandy, are you struck dumb? Ain't you got a word?"

"Bless you, Lew," said Sandy, and went up to him and smiled in his face.

"I'll go see Cordoba and arrange things with him," said Furnival. "You might fix up a snack or something for Lew, Sandy. I'm not gunna be back till the middle of the afternoon at the earliest. So long!"

He was through the door with a rush like the rush of a happy boy. His daughter and her lover remained gravely behind, like old people indeed.

"As soon as he has gone, I'll go," said Lew. "As soon as we hear his horse."

She shook her head. "There's no need of that," said she.

And a heavy silence fell between them, until the rapid clattering of the hoofs of the rancher's horse began and died off down the road. Then Lew Melody picked up his hat and turned toward the door.

He had almost passed through it when a low cry from Sandy stopped him; I dare not think the future might have been for them if that cry had not been uttered. But Melody turned and saw Sandy leaning against the wall very pale and very drawn about the mouth.

"What is it, Sandy?" said he.

"I don't want you to go," said she. "I'm too weak to let you go just now!"

He went back to her and took her cold face between his hands. "Do you think it's right?" said he.

"I don't know," said Sandy. "Is it wrong?"

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They were both trembling; they were both pinched of face and great of eye.

"Only I thought——" said Sandy.

"Tell me," said he.

"That it was our last chance for a little happiness together, Lew."

"It *is* our last chance," said he.

I don't like to repeat what was said then by Sandy, but all her heroism and that touch of saintliness which I think most good women possess—for a few great moments in their lives—vanished from Sandy and left her weak and all too human. But she cried out: "Ah, my dear, why should she have you? Is it only because she rode a horse up into the hills to find you? Is it that, which gives her the right to have you? But I won't submit to it. I'll fight; because it's my life and my happiness that I fight for! And I love you; and you love me; tell me if you do!"

I am glad that I never had to feel such an agony as went thrilling through the body and through the soul of Lew Melody as he listened to her and stared drearily before him at the wall.

CHAPTER IX.

SLIM OVERHEARS.

SLIM had not lain under his tree long when he heard something behind him, no louder than the rushing of a bird's wing through the air, but it made him drop the harmonica and whirl over on his belly with his revolver slipped into his hand by a gesture of wonderful speed such as Lew Melody himself had seen and approved. And when Slim had turned upon his stomach, he found that the barrel of the gun was pointed straight at the piratical form of Miguel Azatlan, who was just half a step from the far side of the tree, sneaking along stealthily with a sort of congealed malice in his face. He stopped with a shock at the sudden change in the posture of the boy. But, after the first start, he was inclined to regard the leveled revolver, in such young hands, as little more than a poor joke. So he grinned at Slim.

"Be careful, my son," said he in Spanish. "There might be a bullet in that!"

"Might there be?" said Slim, showing his teeth as he smiled. "And there might be a pair of 'em—and there might be three pairs, too. And every pair might be meant for you—you yaller-skinned, rat-eyed, long-drawn-out, blue-mouthed alligator!"

"I shall make you yell for that!" said Miguel, turning into a demon at once. "I shall teach one young gringo——"

"Say, greaser," said the boy, "you got a tassel on the side of your hat that you don't need. So I'm gunna take it off for you."

He had his aim on the tassel, well enough, but that aim was a little too close. He clipped off the tassel, but the big-faced bullet tore into the body of the sombrero itself and ripped through the tough felt and sliced away the hat-band, and in short, knocked the sombrero so neatly off the head of the Mexican, that it spun away through the air and left him suddenly bareheaded.

He clapped his hand to his bare sconce with a shout of surprise. And then he snatched out a gun only to hear the sharp voice of this evil young American ripping at his ear:

"Drop that gun, greaser! Drop that gun, or I'll salt you, sure!"

Miguel hesitated; then, being lost in fact, he dropped the gun in all obedience and glowered at Slim.

"Young murderer!" he gasped.

A lie began to expand in the fertile brain of Slim, and grow into a rosy dream of fiction. He began to narrate:

"Sometimes I lay down by the old Rio and snooze in the bushes. Pretty soon, I hear some sap comin down for water on the far side of the river. Then I up and draw a bead on him and give him a yell. And when he looked up, he got it."

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"Son of a devil!" snarled Miguel. "You will be buzzard food before many days—you and Señor Melody. I spit on you and scorn you!"

So he turned himself about and walked away with as much dignity as he could muster. Slim, however, picked up the revolver and gloated over it. It was of a new make, in perfect condition, and all of the six chambers were loaded. The armament of Slim was, in this fashion, doubled on the spot.

However, it was no time for him to linger. Since Miguel had been affronted in this fashion, there was not much which he would not attempt, and there were too many ways of getting, unperceived, within at least rifle range of this tree. So Slim gathered up the reins of Sam, the mustang, and jumped on his back to find a new resting place.

But, as he did so, he heard a clattering of hoofs. He knew that it was not Lew Melody coming down the road, for the sound of the pacer's rhythmic tread was unmistakable to his sharp ears, so he waited with some curiosity.

What he saw, breaking around the bend of the hill and beating up a cloud of dust from the road, was none other than Furnival himself. The rancher was riding hard, and though he was on a willing horse, yet its pace did not suit him, and he mended it from time to time with a stinging cut from a quirt, so that the wind of that gallop made the brim of his hat furl up stiffly in front.

That was enough for Slim. He considered that flying figure for one instant and, comparing its gait with the best pace which he could get out of old Sam, he knew that he could never overtake the flying horseman to ask any questions. Yet he was greatly alarmed. He was too well acquainted with the habits of Lew Melody to be surprised by a disaster of any kind worked by his hands.

What first leaped through the brain of Slim was that Melody might have had trouble with one of the men at the Furnival ranch and that he had shot the man down. Now Furnival himself was rushing for the nearest doctor; that was the meaning, he thought, of such ardent riding on the part of such an elderly and sedate man.

With Slim, as the saying goes, to think was to act. If his idol, Lew Melody, had recently shot down a man, then Lew himself was now in very real trouble. And a man in trouble needs his friends. This was thinking enough for Slim. He turned the roan mustang toward the ranch of Furnival and rode thither at full speed.

But the very first thing that he saw disarmed the greater part of his suspicions. For he discovered that the derrick behind the cattle sheds was still working busily, lifting forkful after forkful of straw to the top of the growing stack, from which a faint smoke of dust and chaff was rising. If there had been a shooting scrape on the place, it seemed most unlikely indeed that the men would be working on in this fashion. If they remained at the stack, it would be to sit in a cluster and talk over similar affairs which had occurred in the valley—particularly if such a person as famous Lew Melody were concerned in the matter.

So Slim paused and took patient thought before he decided upon his next step. It even occurred to him that he might return to the vicinity of the tree where Lew had left him, but when a boy of Slim's age has decided that something may be wrong, and that it concerns the welfare of a friend, he cannot sit down and fold his hands. In another moment Slim had started for the house of Furnival.

He went to the front veranda, dismounted, and stood a moment at the front door. There was not a sound from the house. And yet Lew Melody was not with the working men, and had not returned to the oak, and was cer-

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tainly not with Furnival himself, who had ridden so hard in the direction of Barneytown. It began to seem like an exciting mystery to Slim when, far and faint in the house, he heard the sound of a girl's voice, and, a moment later, the familiar murmur of Lew Melody.

It was such an immense relief to Slim, that he was about to turn away with a sigh; and then he grew interested, not to eavesdrop upon the pair, but in the nice experiment of seeing how sharply he could attune his ears to those light sounds.

There are ways and ways of listening, but few have the power to throw their attention in a definitely concentrated direction. Yet, from the wide and circling horizon of noises around him, Slim shut out from his consciousness the yelping of a far-off coyote—a mere pulse in the air—the sharper conversations from the hen yard behind the house, the dreary squeaking of the derrick pulley, the lowing of a cow like a doleful horn in the distance—all of these noises were closed out of the ear of Slim, and he heard, only, the delicate stir of voices within the house itself. Then, having shut out all else, as a burning glass focuses the sun to a point of fire, so Slim centered his attention and received reward. For, at once, he could distinguish the thread of the conversation. The merest puff of wind would have shattered that dainty web of sound, but no wind came, and presently Slim was fascinated by the picture which those voices were painting for him—a picture so startling and so grim that he could not believe the ears with which he heard it. For he had looked upon Lew Melody as the happiest man in the world; and now he could peek behind the curtain and see the truth! Only a brief glimpse of the truth, but that was enough.

"I shall manage in some way," was the first thing Slim heard Sandy saying.

"Ah, Sandy," said Lew Melody, "I wondered why I should be punished like this, but now I can understand. It's because I've lived for myself and hunted for nothing but my own fun—and my fun was making trouble for other people. I've lived by the gun; and now I'm punished for it."

"You'll be happy, Lew."

"I shall be?"

"She is very pretty; and she loves you. And so do all the Cordobas. But how could they help it? And you'll have money. That helps to smooth out life, I know."

"When she came to me like that in the mountains—I had to do something to save her name. Was there anything else?"

"You had to marry her, Lew. It was the only right thing. Do you think that I shall ever reproach you for it?"

"I know that. And it only makes the pain harder to bear."

"Besides, perhaps I shall be happy, too, after a while. There are things for one to do. And my father needs me. I shall find some sort of happiness. But oh, how I wish that I had never broken out at you to-day! It was only because father brought you in so suddenly—and said so many kind things about you—just for a moment I thought that my heart would break. Because I love you so! Do you forgive me?"

Slim tiptoed from the veranda with a white face.

It was much more to him than if he had looked in upon a frightful murder. He was fifteen, and at fifteen the ideals are as rigidly established as lofty walls of steel. So it was with Slim. Here was his pleasant picture of the future life of Lew Melody pulled down around his ears. He had seen him as the husband of a lovely girl, the son-in-law of a rich man; trouble seemed annihilated for Melody. But here was the truth! And that a man should

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marry a woman he did not love, even from a sense of duty, seemed to Slim—thief, vagabond, and incipient gun fighter as he was—the most deadly and blasting of sins.

"Something has got to be done!" said Slim.

CHAPTER X.

"A VERY GREAT CRIME."

SUCH a decision as Slim had come to was proper enough; but what under heaven could be accomplished, he did not see so clearly. What he was determined upon, however, was that this false marriage should not take place. It was true that he knew Juanita and liked her very well; but he had seen Sandy also, and to see her, as the poet says, was to love her. Moreover, he felt that this project of Melody, to marry one woman while he truly cared for another, was a crime so dreadful that anything was permissible to prevent it. Therefore means, no matter how brutal, did not appeal to Slim as things to be rejected. His only difficulty was to find the way in which the thing could be done.

In the first place, he decided that he could not endure to meet Melody face to face at once. There would be too great a danger of his tongue running away with his discretion, and Melody must not now suspect what was in his mind; for nothing he could say, he very well knew, could alter the mind of Lew.

So he rode the roan mustang straight back toward Barneytown, but at a slow gait; and slowly he was passing through the streets when he came past my house just as I was busy in the garden watering Lydia's hedge of sweet peas, which is the joy of her life, I think, beyond anything else in the world. Well, it is a pretty thing, that hedge, and I think that when it calls the eyes of the townsmen toward our house, it sends them by with a happy thought of their clergyman.

However, the sun was very hot, and when I saw Slim, I was glad to retreat to a corner of the garden under the shade of a tree and turn the hose into the trench to run as it pleased—a thing which Lydia greatly objects to. I waved to Slim, and he rode his horse up close to the fence. He was proud of his ability to talk with men like a man would, and now he drew himself up in the saddle and looked in a patronizing fashion over the brilliant wall of the fragrant color which the sweet-pea hedge raised into the sun. The aroma of it went like a secret blessing half a block away, when the wind was blowing softly.

"That ain't a half-bad garden," said Slim. "But, Jiminy Christmas! Mr. Travis, what a pile of work you and Mrs. Travis must put in on it!"

"Quite a bit," said I. "Quite a bit, but it's worth it. Don't you think so?"

"Well," said this imp, "we all got our own tastes, you know. Speakin' personal, I'd say that these here sweet peas smell pretty sweet, but they smell like work, too, and I dunno that I care for the smell of work."

"Work," said I, a little sententiously, I fear, "is the only great happiness in life."

The eyes of Slim opened at me. "Might that be a joke?" he asked, with a frown of wonder on his young-old face.

"Not at all a joke," said I. "Because, you see, man is intended to labor."

Slim blinked. "I dunno that I see that very clear," he admitted.

I am always glad of an argument, even with a youngster, because an argument will open the mind. I have noticed that I am always more violent about a matter of which I am only half convinced. And one never half persuades the other fellow without becoming half unpersuaded one's self. However, there are certain things about which one feels a calm conviction.

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When they are challenged, one merely smiles down at the challenger, very much as I now smiled down at Slim.

"I'll explain," said I. Do you know really anything in the world that is happy without work? Consider the squirrels and how hard they labor almost all the year!"

"H'm!" said Slim, and looked restlessly about him.

Presently he pointed. "How much work does that do?" said he.

It was a rascally blue jay perched on the top of a sapling, which flaunted it back and forth in the sun, making it look like a rare jewel.

"Ah, that is a pirate, a marauder!" said I.

"What I ask is: Is it happy?" said Slim calmly.

"Why, one can never judge entirely from appearances," said I rather feebly. "I admit that it looks rather pleased with itself; but that's probably because it's thinking of the last bird's nest it robbed—the scoundrel!"

"All right," said Slim patiently; he made his point. "It's happy. And does it work?"

"I don't suppose it does, a great deal," said I.

I was immensely embarrassed, but for a moment I could not think of a favorable direction in which to turn the conversation.

"But after all," said I, "birds and beasts cannot be judged by the same standards that we use for men."

"I dunno," said Slim. "They ain't so different. They're born, the same as us; they live and eat and sleep and drink and die, the same as us. They get mad and they get glad, the same as us. They got their friends and they got their enemies. Ain't they a good deal like us, maybe, after all?"

"My dear child," said I, taking on a more pulpitlike manner, "do you not see the great difference? No, perhaps you do not, because it is not apparent to the naked eye—only to the inward glance which rests upon the spirit!"

"I dunno that I foller you," said Slim, and he politely stifled a yawn.

I grew a little angry, I admit. "Slim," said I, "have animals souls!" "I dunno," said Slim. "Why not?"

It was staggering. I stared at that young pagan for a mute moment, and then I said: "Why—er—isn't it apparent?"

"I dunno that it is," said Slim. "How d'you make it out?"

"Do you dream," said I, "that there is a heaven for dumb beasts?"

"I dunno," said Slim. "Why not?"

"Because they have no souls to go there!"

"That's what you said before," remarked Slim dryly.

"Can they speak? Can they reason?"

"I dunno that a lot of talk is much good," said Slim. "I never heard no talkin', and I never done none that said half of the things that was inside of me. Did you?"

I could not help biting my lip.

"Slim," said I, "could your horse, yonder, reason and talk as we are talking now?"

"Can you smell what's in the wind the way he can?" said Slim. "Can you see as far? Can you hear as well?"

"Physical properties only!" said I. "What is the soul and the heart of a beast compared with that of a man, Slim?"

"I dunno what you mean," said this irritatingly blunt child.

"Consider, for instance, the affections," said I. "What is so beautiful in the world as love! And can a beast really love, Slim?"

"Well," said he, "how many folks is there in the world that you'd die for?"

"Is that to the point?" said I. "However, perhaps there are some. Death is a good deal, however!"

"Could you name one gent that you would die for—I mean, step right out

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and die, for the sake of doin' what he wanted you to do?"

I countered rather adroitly by saying: "Of course a man who asked me to die for him would not be——"

But Slim struck brutally across the fine current of my ideas.

"Well," said he, "Sammy, here, would die for me. He's pretty near done it a couple of times. He'd run till he dropped."

"A mere instinct!" cried I. "Of course, being trained to that work, the poor creature does not understand anything except to run as long as the spurs tickle his ribs."

"You get into this here saddle and ask him to run for you," said Slim. "Only, you better ride him where the ground is soft!"

I flushed a little at this insinuation cast upon my horsemanship, but I was not tempted to mount the little brute.

"Ah, Slim," said I, "who is guilty of giving you an education without any religion?"

"I dunno," said Slim, "whoever done any educating of me, except Lew Melody, with a gun. Maybe he ain't good enough for you?"

He said this with the cold smile of one who names a perfect man and dares criticism to show its face. But I was not in a humor to assail Lew Melody.

"Ah, well," said I, "I would need a great deal of time to convince you. Life will teach you, however. The trouble is that life is a painful schoolmaster. And religion comes easily into the mind of man at two times only—his childhood and his death bed."

"I'd like to know one thing," said Slim, "and that's this talk about hell. How much real stuff is there in it?"

I could only say: "I don't know. But some of us feel that there must be some punishment hereafter for sins which are not punished on earth. Just as we hope that there is a reward for the good that is done."

"What would you say," said Slim, "is the worst thing a man could do?"

"Murder, I suppose."

"Aw, I dunno," said Slim. "I've seen murder. It ain't so bad. It's over quick, anyways. But what about a gent that loves a girl and marries the wrong woman. Ain't that about as bad as you can think?"

I did not know, at that time, what Slim had overheard. I was inclined to smile, but this touch of idealism in the boy sobered me.

"It *is* a very great crime," said I, and the thought of Lew Melody and Sandy Furnival did not enter my stupid head! That I had confirmed Slim in his secret thoughts never occurred to me; but his determination was simply that he must save his friend from the dark of hell itself by preventing this marriage with the daughter of Cordoba.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE RIVER BOTTOM.

FROM a secret coign of vantage, Slim watched the return of Lew Melody to the house of Cordoba. And he saw enough in the manner of Lew to convince him that what he had heard at the door of the house of Furnival was not an illusion, but a gloomy fact. For Melody did not sweep down the street at the full and reckless speed of the Gray Pacer, whirling a cloud of dust behind him, but at a dreary and a trudging gait, as though the horse beneath him were exhausted with much work. And yet the Pacer was fairly dancing to be off and away at the full of his stride.

Something had happened in the mind of Melody like the drawing of a curtain which darkens a room. From the window of the Cordoba house, a silvery voice called, and Lew Melody looked up with a smile to Juanita. But it was a forced smile, and an observer as keen as the hidden boy could not fail to note the difference.

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All that he saw convinced him more and more.

He decided that there was new and perhaps greater trouble coming, which inspired him to do two things. The first was to run to a Mexican restaurant and there eat the quickest and most filling meal he could get—which was a few tortillas wrapped around cold frijoles. That meal would have been lead in the stomach of any other than Slim, but he returned untroubled to his post from which he could survey comfortably the whole front of the Cordoba house, without being seen in return. There he curled up and fell into a semi-sleep, for this young animal, like any fox, could sleep with his eyes partly open—as one might say. At least, he was perfectly capable of doing all but lose consciousness while he kept his observance upon one point. That point was the house of Cordoba.

He had an animal patience, too. No cat ever starved and waited by the hole of a mouse with more equanimity, apparently, than did young Slim. For one thing, he was very tired, and therefore he remained in that semi-sleep the more easily. His place was the flat top of a roof, sheltered from view from the street by another projecting and overlapping eaves above him. Here he remained for long hours. Sometimes he roused enough to change sides and curl into a new position of comfort. Otherwise there was no change. But his skinny body was drinking up rest as the desert drinks up rain.

At length he saw the form of the person for whom he was waiting, slip out from the patio gate of the Cordoba house. Slim was instantly wide awake. What he had seen was no more than a dull silhouette, for it was now late at night, and there was nothing but the shining of the bright mountain stars and an occasional yellow bar of lamplight that struck softly across the street. He was very cold as he sat up on the housetop and yawned and stretched the sleep from his body.

But, in the meantime, he was using his eyes industriously. There was no room for doubt. Even if the outline of the man had not been familiar to him, he would have known the furtive lightness of step with which the other now turned down the street—he would have known the very speed of that walk.

Instantly Slim was out of his spy's nest. He dropped down the face of that house like a wild mountain goat jumping from ledge to ledge. So Slim lowered himself to the ground in an unbroken streak. And he set off in pursuit of his friend, Lew Melody, for it was he.

Never was there such anxious caution as that of Slim at this moment, for he knew by the very manner of Melody that, no matter what his goal, it was one to which he wished to go unaccompanied. And when one is shadowing a fox, there is need of more than foxlike cunning. If Lew Melody was a drifting shadow that went rapidly down the street, Slim was a shadow also. His bare feet gave him a great advantage. There was no possibility of striking out a noise as his heel dislodged a small stone. It was as though he were equipped with another pair of eyes in his toes, that told him beforehand the nature of the ground over which he was passing.

They were out of the skirts of the town before Slim had the least idea to what the trail might lead him. For when they were clear of the house, Lew Melody went straight for the heavily-wooded river bottom.

Slim, crouched behind the corner of a fence, took counsel with himself, and he was quaking in every fiber of his being. He understood, now. For he was not ignorant of the stories which had been alive in Barney Valley during the last eight years, of how Lew Melody rescued himself from ennui by hunting

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trouble in the "jungles" of the Barney River bottom lands. In those tangles of willow, the floating life of crime that moved up and down the valley on the trail to Mexico and out again, paused to recruit itself. From those darkly forested places, there issued the covert figures which stole into the town to pilfer what they could lay their hands on.

It was on that account that every yard in Barneytown contained a dog as fierce and as formidable as the pocketbook of the house owner could afford to buy. It was on that account that the streets of the town were deserted at night. Nothing but petty crimes were to be feared, to be sure, for the criminals with greater thoughts in their hearts, postponed the execution of them until they came to more favorable sections of the country. It was the fear of this same night prowler who advanced in front of Slim, that restrained them. Time was when they had come up out of the tramp "jungles" of the bottom lands and committed wild and nameless crimes in the little village. But that time was gone. The fear of the law had been impressed upon them by a man more wild and more tigerish than they themselves—Lew Melody!

I, of course, have never seen him in his element—in his glory, I had almost said. And yet even a minister could be forgiven if he pointed out the majesty of this man's courage, no matter how it was linked with savagery. Here he was stalking through the night toward a place where there might be a dozen bold, strong, cunning men, all bound to be turned into mortal enemies of his the instant he was seen. For when he was seen, he would be recognized. Certainly no hurrying exile ever passed down the Barney Valley without receiving, beforehand, some warning from his peers of the man-slayer who would lie in his path at Barneytown!

And how much would I not have given to have seen him that night, as Slim saw him, gliding on without sound, scanning all things around him with piercing glances, and never knowing what dark alley mouth, or what fence corner, or what copse of trees, or what thicket of brush contained enemies on the lookout for him and as ready to shoot—if they could do so in safety—as you or I would be ready to set heels upon a loathsome, poisonous spider!

It was very long after this that Slim told me all the thoughts that passed through his mind as he lay there at the corner of the fence, watching his hero pass on down toward the darkness of the bottom lands; and I, hearing them, could understand and sympathize. It was like stepping of one's own free will into the region of a nightmare! And, for a time, Slim hesitated, while the form in front of him first faded and then was lost in the dark of the first trees.

But the instant his eyes lost sight of the man, Slim knew that he could not let him go on alone. He started out at once and ran fast through the dark—fast but softly, as only Slim knew how to run. He wound through the blackness of the copse into which Lew Melody had run—until something sprang on him from behind like a beast of prey, and struck him to the earth.

There had never been a time when Slim had been handled like this. Not even the brutal force of Stan Geary, when that monster used him like a slave, had so paralyzed Slim. He was caught in hands that bit through flesh to the bone with the strength of their hold. And, in an instant, Slim was helpless, pinned down upon his face.

He had only one thought—of Miguel Azatlan.

And then he heard the voice of Lew Melody, turned to iron: "Slim!"

He was too shocked to make any reply, and so he found himself picked up by the back of the neck and dragged

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into the dim starlight of a clearing. He was set upon his feet and stood, wavering, before this changed man.

Be sure that this was not that Lew Melody who had been saved from great peril, on a day, by the testimony of Slim in a courtroom. It was not that man, but quite another—an animal of glistening eyes and stern face, a pantherlike creature with no human tenderness in his soul.

"You've followed me, Slim," said Melody.

"I follered you," admitted Slim, shaking.

"D'you know what I came within an ace of doing?" asked Melody, towering above the youngster. "I came within an ace of putting a bullet in you and letting you lie."

"Lew," said the boy, "I didn't mean no harm."

"But I did," answered Melody. "I had the knife ready when I jumped at you, Slim. And only by the grace of God I knew when my hand gripped you that you were a boy and not a man. Otherwise you'd be lying back yonder with your throat cut and a few heaps of dead leaves kicked over you. What do you mean by trailing me?"

"I meant nothing wrong," muttered poor Slim.

"You meant nothing wrong!" snarled out Lew Melody. "You meant nothing wrong! Why, you young fool, I knew that I was being shadowed the moment that I left the town, and before that. I knew that I was being followed from the gate of Cordoba's house, and I waited until I could hunt the hunter."

A chill struck through the body of Slim.

"How could you tell, Lew?" he faltered. For he was certain that he had not been seen.

"How can you tell when there's a cold wind blowing on your back?" asked Lew Melody.

"I didn't know," said Slim. "But I thought that you was heading for trouble. That's why I——"

"Why did you think that? Why did you watch the Cordoba house?"

"Who said that I watched it?"

"For hours—or you wouldn't have seen me leave it."

"I only happened along——"

"You lie. And what made you think that I was started for trouble? Slim, I think that you've done a worse thing than lie to me to-day! And if you have——" He paused, breathing hard. "Go back from the river bottom," said Lew Melody. "Don't try to trail me again. Because if you do, I'll make you wish that you were never born. Now, run for it!"

And Slim turned and ran—ran as if a ghost were pursuing him.

CHAPTER XII.

SIX BAD MEN.

LOOK in with me upon a little domestic scene in the river bottom near our town, on this night when Lew Melody went on his last man hunt.

It was a clearing on the bank of the river, which runs broad and smooth around a bend, at this point, with its quiet shallows at the edges, dotted with stars. There had been a big and cheerful fire earlier in the night—a fire which tossed armfuls of leaping flames far higher than the tops of the big trees around the clearing. That flaring light made every tree stand out as cold and bright as the sun on a stormy day when the clouds are herded fitfully across its face. But now the great fire had fallen away to an extensive bed of coals which cast a soft light through the clearing, and the trees were solid with shadow. Still, in the center of the open space, near the fire, there was warmth enough, and there was light enough for men to sit in comfort and talk, smoke, and play cards. And that is what they were doing, the six men of this party.

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First there was a long, lean man with a grave and thoughtful face, smoking a cigarette with half-shut eyes, as though he were seeing, in his dreams, another scene than this; and beside him a bull-necked fellow had spread out a little sewing kit and was busily mending a rent in his coat, which he had taken off and held in his lap. From time to time, he lifted the coat and examined his work with a careful scrutiny, to see whether he was mending smoothly enough. Just beyond them was a jovial face—a very youthful face with gray hair in odd contrast above it. He had his arms locked around his knees, and he was talking softly—telling his yarn in such a quiet voice that he would not disturb the game of blackjack which continued near by.

At this game, which was played upon a spread-out slicker—sat two people whom you have seen before—Miguel and Cristobal Azatlan. But with them was an American who wore a derby hat, oddly out of keeping in such surroundings as these. He was a pale, sickly-looking youth with the long fingers of an artist.

It was a very quiet scene, and there was no noise except the voice of the narrator, just raised above the silky flow of Barney River.

Let me introduce you to these men again, by name and nature. The grave gentleman with the lean face was Doc Ransom, a confidence man of the old school, and what he dreamed of was the palmy height of his career, when he sat in far other company than this, and spent the money which he had cheated out of the pockets of better men than himself. The bull-necked individual was Tony Mack, who not only understood how to use a needle as well as any housewife, but who was also expert in certain devices which would lift the door from a safe. He had performed these operations in many of the largest cities in the country, and he was now destined, after a streak of bad luck, for the flourishing city of El Paso, where luck and dollars would flow back upon him again. The third of this trio in the foreground was also a known man, for he of the rubicund face and the gray hair was none other than "Smiling" Dan Harper, whose greatest accomplishment was his ability to get his gun out of the holster before the other man, and then shoot quicker and straighter. He had demonstrated his ability in so many lands that sundry sheriffs all over the West were very tired of his exploits in self-defense. He dared not kill again without risking his neck at the end of a hangman's rope. But still, behind those pleasant, smiling eyes, there was the consuming passion—the same passion, in a way, that was now leading Lew Melody toward this very spot!

The Azatlan brothers are already known to you, and he who was playing with them, the sickly youth with the hands of an artist, was a boy from great New York, two thousand miles away. He was a talented youngster who began in a small way as a sneak thief, but while he was still in his teens, he formed the more exciting habit of walking into small stores in outlying districts of the great town and presenting his gun under the nose of the fear-stricken clerk while he demanded the proceeds of the cash drawer. But, having served a sentence—abbreviated for good behavior—he reverted to his earlier talents in a modified form and became a second-story man, able to open a window without sound, and able to smell out the hidden treasures of a home in their most secret places. He, also, had had a streak of bad luck, but he was turning his face toward more southern and more profitable scenes.

This was the sextet who waited in the hollow clearing for the coming of Lew Melody—though, if they knew that he was at hand—if they knew that he was at this moment lurking at the edge

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of the forest, watching and weighing them one by one with an unerring instinct—you may be sure that they would not sit so quietly, but would scatter to the trees like so many frightened rabbits.

But let us pick up the tale which our friend, Smiling Dan Harper, was telling. It may lead us into some amusement.

"When I hit the inside of that box car, I sat down and eased up a mite, and pretty soon I heard some one come along and drop the lock on the outside of the door. But I was too fagged to worry about that. The train started up in another minute and I went to sleep, with the car swaggerin' and swayin' along that jerkwater line. We kept on moseyin' along I dunno how long. I was dead to the world. Finally there was a lot of jammin' around, and then I felt that box car go rambling smooth as silk onto a sidin'. The brakes come on and we squeezed to a stop.

"'In the mornin',' says I to myself, 'they'll open up this here car to shove a load aboard, and they'll laugh when they find that there's a carload already aboard her!'

"So I went back to sleep and slept for a long time. When I woke up, the sun was shining through the cracks of that old car. I peeled my eye through one of the cracks, and all I could see was trees that was walkin' down to the side of the track. Then I peeled my eye on the other side, and all I seen was trees walkin' down to the side of the track, just the same way!

"Well, I wait for a couple of hours till my empty belly begins to bother me. Then I up and make a racket. I just hollered, at first, and then I started kickin' the sides of that car and yappin' real loud. I kept that up for pretty near an hour. Seemed like I was makin' enough noise to be heard right over the top of the mountains, but when I got through I listened and didn't hear nothin' but a sort of an echo of the noise I'd made, rollin' and roarin' through my ears.

"I sits down and has a think. By the sun and the warmth in that car, I know that it's pretty well along toward noon, and so the station agent is reasonable sure to have been around. I take a long rest and try to figger it all out, but it sort of puzzles me.

"Well, as I was sayin' before, I hadn't done much sleepin' since the posse started after me, so instead of worryin' none I took the kinks out of my belly by tightenin' my belt, and then I curled up and went to sleep again. When I woke up, there was a sound of a shufflin' step outside the car.

"'Some lazy bum of a shack,' says I to myself, and then I hollers out:

"'Hello, pal! Gimme a lift out of this, will you?'

"That shufflin' noise stopped, and then it went scamperin' away toward the trees; I never heard the sound of no man runnin' that was just like it. And, the next minute, while I was tryin' to peel my eye through a crack in the side of the car, I smelled bear as plain as you ever smelled bacon in the mornin'.

"Bear was what it was! There ain't no mistakin' that smell. And that showed me where I was. No bear would come wanderin' around the sidin' of a real town or even of a real station. No bear would come inside of ten mile of a place full of switchmen and what not.

"What had happened was that the train had sided that car in the middle of the mountains. I could remember seein' cars that had stood out on little sidin's like that one for half a year, till their wheels was froze to the rails with rust. And how long would it be before they come to get that car again?

"I sat thinkin' it over, and feelin' my face get cold with sweat. But there was no use just settin' and waitin'. I got out my knife and started to work on

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the side boards of that car. Dog-gone me if that wood wasn't like iron! It pretty near turned the point of the knife. It was an old car, but it looked like it had been boarded up new all around pretty recent. So I got sort of peeved, and gave the knife an extra hard jab. And the blade busted right off!

"Well, there I was, pretty well strapped, you might say, and feelin' pretty sick, inside and outside. All that I had in my hand for a tool was a dog-gone bit of a busted-off blade of a knife, and it looked like there wasn't much more use in tryin' to work with a tool like that than there was to start in scratchin' that hard wood with my nails.

"But there wasn't any use in settin' still. I had to do something, or else go mad. I got to work and I walked around that car, and every plank I tested out by punchin' at it with the blade of that knife. And, finally, I got hold of a plank that seemed a lot softer than the rest of 'em. So I got to work on it right away.

"Well, sir, it *was* just scratchin' and nothing better! After about an hour, with my hands sore and my arms tired, I'd only made a couple of rough white streaks across that plank.

"I sat down to take a breath and think it over again. I could do a long turn without food, I knew, but without water, nobody can last very long. And there was a hot sun over the top of that car, and the inside of it was like an oven. I needed water awful bad. Seemed like I'd been dry for a week, already. And I knew by what I'd heard that a gent can go only about three days without a drink. I asked myself how many days would it take me to cut through the wall of that car?

"Just thinkin' about it throwed such a scare into me that I knew that I'd have to keep to work if I didn't want to bust down with the shakes.

"I grabbed up that knife again and set my teeth and sailed into the plank."

"Psst!" came the warning hiss of one of the gamblers.

And, at the same moment, a light-stepping shadowy form of a man came out from the trees and approached the glow of the fire.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FINAL BLOW.

MIGUEL AZATLAN, having seen him most recently, knew him first and gave his brother the tidings in a murmur which was nevertheless heard plainly by all the rest:

"Be ready, Cristobal! That is Señor Melody!"

Tod Gresham, the boyish second-story man and nimble-fingered thief, was so filled with alarm that he jumped half to his feet and prepared to bolt for the woods. It was the long arm of Doc Ransom, the confidence man, that darted out and caught him and dragged him back to the ground.

"It's Melody!" gasped out the robber.

"Maybe it is. But here are six of us," said Doc Ransom. "Sit tight, my boy. We may need one another, but we don't need to run. Sit still, and watch, and shake your gun loose, so you can get it quick!"

This admirable advice was received by the youthful thief with a shudder of distaste. It was true that he went armed and that he had worked with the trigger of a gun as much as most men of his profession. And yet he had no liking for this work which seemed about to lie ahead of them.

"Guys like you," he snarled softly to Doc, "are just the sort that he uses for his meat—leave your hands off that kale!"

The last was directed to Cristobal Azatlan who, seeing that there was a momentary disturbance, decided to profit by raking in all the stakes which were on the slicker and pocketing them. At the bark of Tod Gresham, he refrained.

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with a rolling up of his eyes like the glare of a bull before it charges.

In the meantime, Lew Melody had advanced into the rich circle of the fire-light and hailed them with a sort of quiet cordiality: "Hello, boys!"

"How's things?" said the white men.

And: "Señor," murmured the two Mexicans.

They were sitting close together, these two dark-eyed sons of trouble, and lean Miguel whispered at the ear of his half brother:

"Why not now, brother?"

"Is your gun ready?"

"I shall use a knife. I trust it more."

"No! While you draw back your arm to throw the knife—even if you are quicker than a striking snake, he will have his revolver out and he will kill us both! We must work with guns only."

"As you please. But quickly. I am nervous, brother."

"Not yet! See how cool the devil is! Perhaps he has friends yonder in the brush. If he did not have them there, how would he dare to come in this way to six of us?"

"True!"

"One of us must try to come behind him—or else, one on either side of him. Then watch me—when I start my hand, start yours. One of us he is sure to kill. I hope it is I, not you, my brother!"

"As God wills, so must it be. Farewell!"

"Farewell, brother. We shall never speak to one another again in this world!"

So, in whispers inaudible a foot away, quickly, with the resignation of stoics, they determined to kill or be killed.

Lew Melody, in the meantime, had entered into a cheerful conversation with the others.

Smiling Dan Harper led the talk with: "We hear that you aim to settle down, Melody?"

"Is that what marriage means?" said Melody.

"I suppose so."

"Well, you ought to know, Harper!"

"You know me?" cried Dan Harper in surprise, and in alarm also.

"Oh, yes."

"How does that happen?"

"I knew Sam Arnold."

"Was he a friend of yours?" asked Harper, his voice becoming a little strained.

"We used to have fist fights when I was a kid. Well, I don't think that I could call him a friend. Did he put up a real fight with you?"

Dan Harper hesitated an instant. It was two years ago that he had killed Sam Arnold. The face and the voice of that unlucky boy floated back upon his memory too vividly.

"It was a bad evening's work for me," said Harper, watching the face of his inquisitor with a sort of critical anxiety. "We'd been drinking, and then we started playing cards. I thought that Sam had too much luck. And he said that it was just the swing of the cards. But when a feller wins seven hands running—well, you know, Melody."

"Sure," said Melody, with the utmost good nature. "Some one said that you shot him under the table."

The face of Dan Harper contracted. "As I was jumpin' the gun out of the leather, the darn thing went off——"

"I understand," said Lew Melody, and smiled. "They tell me that you got two more slugs into Arnold as he was droppin' to the floor."

"That's a lie, and a loud lie! I'd like to get the dirty dog that told it!"

"Maybe it is. It's a queer thing how facts are lost when a story has been told a few times, isn't it, Dan?"

"You're right," declared Dan, welcoming this friendly tone.

And he felt that there might well be a reason behind this friendliness. If

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Lew Melody had come into the jungle bent on action, he certainly could not wish to attack all six of them at the same time. He must establish a friendship with a few of them—or a state of neutrality, at least.

"To say that I'd shoot a man that was down!" cried Harper. "That's a rotten thing to spread around. I'd like to get the rat who said it."

"I've forgotten," said Lew. "It was some fellow from Montana. He told us quite a lot about you."

"What else?"

"Why, I remember that he said that Shep McArthur was a friend of yours."

Here Tony Mack, whose glittering eyes had never left the face of the young gun fighter, broke in: "Well, that was the truth. You and Shep was bunkies, Dan. Ain't that right?"

"We was," admitted Harper. "He was my best friend in the world. He left me one summer. Heaven knows whatever became of him!"

"I can tell you," said Lew Melody, "one part of the story. I met him right here. There was a fire that night a good deal like this one to-night. I remember that Shep McArthur was boss of the fire and was telling the boys what to do. He told me to get some wood for the fire, and he spoke very sharply. I'm a very sensitive, nervous sort of a chap, Harper. When he spoke to me that way, I couldn't help objecting. And in another moment—you know how it is—we had our guns out. I was unlucky enough to hit him with the first shot."

He was speaking with an oiled gentleness, but the eyes which he fastened upon Dan Harper were the eyes of a tiger. He held the entire group fascinated.

"That bullet went through his leg, Dan. He shouted that he had enough as he dropped, and I stopped shooting, of course. But the minute he saw me lower my gat, he raised his and started pumping lead at me as he lay on the ground. His bullet nicked my ear. I'll always remember McArthur because of the chip on the rim of this ear." He touched the place gently with his fingers.

"So you understand, Dan, why I had to kill him?"

"I understand," said Dan Harper huskily. And all the muscles in his throat were distended by the grip of his teeth as he ground them together.

"I'll sit down by you, Mack," said Melody, "if you don't mind." And he made himself comfortable by the fire—sitting at the extreme point of the arc of which Cristobal Azatlan made the other tip.

"You know me, too?" said the yegg.

"I know that Dan Harper and Tony Mack often travel together," said Lew. "That's why I suppose that you're Tony Mack."

"Our friend seems to be a mind reader!" exclaimed Doc Ransom, who had been using the last conversational interval to shift his gun to a more convenient pocket. "He seems to be able to select names for all of us! What about our two friends on the left? Could you name them?" said Doc Ransom.

"Miguel and Cristobal Azatlan," said Lew Melody. "We have met before. I might almost say that we are old friends. I knew their brother a year ago!"

The deadly irony of this remark caused even the calm of Doc Ransom to break a little, and he flashed a side glance at the two Mexicans. But they sat with faces of stone, smoking and hearing nothing.

"And here is another," said Ransom, pointing to Tod, the sneak thief and burglar. "You have given four names out of six, and I suppose that you could name this gentleman, also?"

Perhaps I have pointed out that Lew Melody had, one by one, created enemies out of four of the six men in the circle

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around the fire. It was impossible, surely, that he could intend to throw down the glove to the entire six! But now he lighted a cigarette, and waved an open path through the mist of his first expelled breath so that he might study Tod Gresham more intently.

"I don't know your name, partner," said the gentle voice of Lew Melody, "but I can tell how you make your living."

Tod started nervously. "Tell me, then!" said he, filled with defiance.

"Why, that's easy enough. You make your living with your hands—and yet you don't work."

The sneak thief clenched his fists and glared at the other, but after a moment's reflection, he decided that if such a formidable warrior as Dan Harper had decided to pocket up a cause for battle, certainly he, Tod Gresham, could afford to follow that example.

"You have named four and the occupation of a fifth," said Doc Ransom, turning his cool glance straight upon Melody. "And what about me?"

"You're another who hates work," said Lew Melody. "Talk is enough for you, is it not? You can talk money out of the purses of other men, I suppose!"

It was the final blow. One by one, he had slapped each of the six in the face!

CHAPTER XIV.

JUANITA TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Slim bolted away from Lew Melody, he had no thoughts of turning back, after a little time, and attempting to resume the trail. For he felt very much as though he had walked after a tamed house cat and found it transformed suddenly into a panther. The thought of that stalking panther drove him on until his breath failed and then he slowed to a walk. His feet were now in the velvet dust of the old town, and that softness was grateful to them, for as the ecstasy of fear subsided in him, he was aware that they were cut and bleeding and tingling with pain—with such abandon had he raced through the dark of the night.

He paused, finally, to take stock of possibilities. What he was convinced of was that Lew Melody had gone out to throw away his life because life had become a burden to him; and, in some way, this thing must be avoided. All that he could think of on the spur of the moment was to go to the house of Cordoba—not that Cordoba himself was a fighting man who could rescue Slim's hero, but Cordoba was rich, and Slim knew that money works with a thousand strong hands.

So he went to the black-faced house of the money lender, where the stars struck out a few high lights out of the blank windows. He knocked at the front door, first, but he got no response. Then he clambered to the balcony and tapped again, loudly, at the upper door which opened upon that balcony.

Finally he heard muffled voices. Then a light gleamed inside the room and the voice of Cordoba, shaken with excitement, called:

"Who's there?"

"Slim!" said the boy.

A lamp was suddenly interposed between the curtain and the window of the door, so that a strong shaft of light struck out upon Slim, leaving the holder of the lamp in darkness. Then the door was unfastened and opened.

"What do you wish, young man?" said Cordoba, repressing stronger language because he knew that Slim was a close friend to Lew Melody.

"I want help for Lew," said the boy. "He——"

"What sort of help for a man soundly asleep—too soundly asleep to hear your rapping?" growled out Cordoba, yawning.

"Go look in his room, if you don't believe me," said Slim, furious at every delay.

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Cordoba scanned him once again—cast an anxious glance around the room to make sure that there was nothing this young vagabond could steal when his back was turned, and then hurried to the room of Melody. He opened the door and then came hurrying back, this time with a pale face.

"He is not here!" muttered Cordoba. "He is not here. But I saw him go to his room—how——"

"He's in the river bottom!"

"No, no!" groaned Cordoba. "He vowed that he would give up such—how can you know that he is there?"

"I follered him till he found me out and sent me back. He's bound for the river bottom, and to raise the devil there!"

"Ah," groaned the unhappy man, "why should he do such a thing as that—now!"

"Because he ain't happy," said Slim, trembling with emotion.

"We saw that he was moody to-night—all young men will be that way. They are like calves or colts! They have whims. But—boy, do you know that his marriage is less than a week away?"

"And ain't that the thing that's eatin' him now?" cried Slim.

"Diablo!" gasped out Cordoba, and could say no more, while he stared at Slim as at a ghost.

"Where was he to-day?" went on Slim bitterly. "Where did he go to-day?"

"To Señor Furnival, yes. But what of that?"

"To Furnival? The devil, no! Maybe he seen Furnival—but the one he stayed to talk to was Sandy!"

Cordoba put down the lamp because his hand had begun to shake so that he dared not continue holding it.

"You are talking of something that means more than your words," said the money lender. "Ah, may we keep sorrow from Juanita's life! A blow is about to fall; I have felt it, and I have dreaded its coming! Boy, tell me whatever you know!"

"I know that Lew Melody is eatin' his heart out because he's got to marry Juanita," said Slim.

There is little tact in boys. Besides, Slim was desperate. It was the picture of Lew Melody's peril that crushed him, not the troubles of the old money lender. And when Cordoba stretched out his hands in appeal and cried: "How can that be?" the answer of Slim was brutally to the point:

"Because it's Sandy that he loves—don't everybody love her? And ain't Lew the only gent that she ever looked at?"

In this great crisis, Cordoba gathered all his strength and became calm. "Speak softly," said he. "If there is any truth in what you say—but there cannot be! But not a whisper of it must be heard in this house—or it would turn my home into a hell! Now tell me how you could know this? But you could not know! It is a guess—a dream!"

"Cordoba," said Slim fiercely, "I heard 'em talkin'. I stood at the door when they thought that I was a mile away, and I heard 'em talkin'."

Cordoba sank into a chair and supported his face in both uncertain hands.

"It is the end!" groaned he. "It is the black day of our three lives! What is my sin that this should be done to me now? But he—treacherous devil! He has crept like a snake into the heart of my girl!"

"He done the right thing as he seen it," said Slim. "When Juanita rode up to him in the mountains—he had to try to keep her from bein' talked about. He wants to go through with it, but I tell you that after he seen Sandy to-day, he'd rather die than marry anybody else. I tell you that I stood there and heard 'em talk like they was both gunna die the next minute. And now Lew is down in the river bottom huntin' for trouble—

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and God knows that he'll find it! Them Azatlans are there, and I know that Tony Mack and Smilin' Dan blew into Barneytown to-day. He'll run amuck with the whole gang of 'em—unless you do something to stop him!"

"He must be stopped," gasped out Cordoba, staring wildly about him. "Think for me, my boy! Find a way! How shall I do it?"

"Ain't you got a house full of servants? Ain't you got friends? Get half a dozen gents with guns and send 'em for the bottom lands. They'll find him there, and I'll be one of the gang. I'll do as big a share as any other man—only, by myself, I couldn't handle Lew to-night. He's gone sort of crazy. I thought he was gunna kill me for follerin' him."

The door into the room of Juanita had opened some moments before, and now she ran out at them, a slender white form.

"It is too late already!" cried she. "Do you hear?"

Up from the river bottom, in the breath of silence that followed, they heard the sudden chattering of guns—many guns in rapid action like a mutter of musketry in the distance. But Cordoba forgot everything else. He ran to his daughter and caught her by the shoulders and turned her so that the light struck across her face.

"What have you heard, Juanita?" groaned he.

"I have heard everything," said she.

"It is all a lie!" moaned Cordoba. "There is no truth in it. You shall not believe, my sweet girl!"

She tore herself away from him. "Why do you speak of me, always!" cried she. "Don Luis is being murdered in the river bottom! Raise the town. Do not wait to saddle the horses. Ride bareback. Ride, ride! I shall come as I can—will you go? Will you stand still and drive me all mad!"

And she rushed back into her room.

Her mother came hurrying in as Juanita tore off her nightclothes and began to dress haphazard. In the distance there was the voice of Cordoba thundering to his neighbors—the sound of other windows opening, with a slam—other voices shouted in reply.

"What are you doing?" sobbed the señora. "Where are you going, Juanita?"

"I am going where I may help him for the last time," said the girl.

"God pity us!"

"Have you heard, too?"

"Everything! But it must be a lie!"

"A lie? I heard the guns in the hollow. And I know that he is dying now."

"You must not go. Juanita——"

The girl knocked away the hands of her mother with a furious strength. "Do not touch me. I *must* go. If I may hear his last words—perhaps he will see my face—the last face in his life——"

"Juanita, it will kill you—it will break your heart! You will die of it!"

"What is *my* life?"

"He has lied and pretended to you——"

"Ah," cried the girl savagely, "if you say such things of him, I could kill you!"

She had dressed while she talked, flinging her clothes upon her body and now, stamping her slender feet into her boots, her short black hair whirling about her head, she rushed past the señora and across the big room, and past the piano where her mother had played while she taught Lew Melody to dance—and to dance his way, so, into the heart of Sandy Furnival.

She thought of these things as she fled down the back stairs of the house. And when she reached the courtyard, she found a swirl of men and horses there—saddling—arming, shouting.

"Don't wait for saddles!" cried Juanita. "There is no time! There are

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men dying in the river bottom! God reward you if you hurry!"

But, fast as they fled down the road, she was up with the leaders, before they reached the woods. She was up with them, flashing along on the bare back of the pinto mare, which had been given to her by Melody himself.

A reward because she had taught him to dance!

CHAPTER XV.

THE DOCTOR'S STRANGE VERDICT.

WHEN Lew Melody had, in his own fashion, insulted the half dozen grim fighters who sat around him, a little pause followed, and during that pause his hand went slowly to his lips and down again, as he puffed at the cigarette.

And all were fascinated by that hand. It was as slender, almost, as the hand of a woman, but the square-tipped fingers and the round wrist, in which the cords thrust out at every movement, told of the gripping strength which was there.

It was neither grace nor beauty in that hand, however, which so charmed the watchers, but the peculiar steadiness with which it moved and, every moment or so, flicked the ashes from the fuming end of the cigarette. For, very obviously, he now stood in danger of his life from six men, and each one of them was capable of struggling like a tiger. Yet he continued his smoking with the same deliberation—even when Miguel Azatlan, rising to put a fresh clump of brush upon the fire, moved to another part of the circle, a point at which he was just opposite to his brother.

But Lew Melody did not appear to see. Neither did he seem to care when the heat of the glowing embers of the fire ignited the dry brush and sent a hissing column of flame aloft in the air, where it stood like an orange pillar, wagging its head and snapping off wild arms of brightness that vanished instantly in the black of the night.

Yet he was now at a greater disadvantage than ever. Only a gunman of such uncanny expertness as himself could have shot with any certainty in the dull light of a moment before, but in the full flare of the fire, each of the six would have immensely improved chances.

No one spoke. And yet the loudest speeches, the most blasphemous insults could not have filled the air with such a tensity of excitement.

Then, from the town, an excited dog began to bark, the noise coming in sharp little pulses through the air and dropping into the clearing.

"Darn that dog!" said Tony Mack.

"I'd like to kill all dogs in the world!" snarled Smiling Dan Harper. "I've had their teeth in my legs too often!

"Then start right in close to home," muttered Tod Gresham, who was trembling and gasping in a nervous frenzy of excitement.

"Start where?" asked Tony Mack, who was slow of wit.

"Here!" screamed the boy, and snatched at his gun.

When he leveled it, he found that he was covering not Lew Melody, but the squat form of Tony Mack, for at the voice of the boy, Melody had dropped his cigarette and flung himself at the yegg. Even that stoutly muscled body was helpless under his handling. They whirled—and Tony Mack staggered helplessly back toward the fire as Melody leaped for the trees.

The first bullet to follow him was that of Tod Gresham. It clipped his coat at the point of the shoulder. The second was from the gun of Miguel Azatlan; and his brother's bullet whirred past the ear of the retreating fighter. But before there was a chance for more action, Tony Mack pitched back into the midst of the fire, beat down the flames, scattered the flaring brush far and wide, and threw the whole group into confusion. Tony Mack himself rolled with a

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scream from that terible bed and started, still yelling with agony, toward the broad, black coldness of the water.

Lew Melody had turned from his flight toward the trees and dropped flat on the ground with two guns stretched out before him.

His first shot caught the tall body of Miguel Azatlan squarely in the stomach and, plowing through his flesh, broke the backbone. He died without a groan. His second shot landed below the hips of Tod Gresham and passed through both thighs. He fell with a shriek of pain, for his flesh was frightfully torn. Then Melody was up and flying toward the trees again. For there was no other easy target before him. The remaining three, Smiling Dan Harper and Doc Ransom and burly Cristobal Azatlan, had sought better cover by throwing themselves upon the ground in immitation of his own maneuver.

As he ran, he swerved like a football player running through a broken field, and though the bullets sang wickedly around him, he reached the very border of the trees before he was struck.

He did not know where the shot landed. But from head to feet he went numb, while the heavy blow knocked him forward upon his face.

The wild, three-throated yell of the enemy called back his senses from a fog of pain and shock. He turned on the ground and fired at a leaping form which ran toward him, gigantically big and black against the firelight.

That grotesque figure seemed to be snuffed into nothingness! In reality, Smiling Dan Harper had gone to the ground with a bullet through his head.

But there were two other points of rapidly jetting fire—the weapons of Azatlan and Doc Ransom. Twice, long ripping thrills of flame passed through the flesh of Lew Melody before the sheer ecstasy of pain enabled him to roll into the covering shadows of the trees. He managed to gain hands and knees and so to drag himself behind a trunk.

There he lay with his back to the firelight in the clearing and his face turned toward the heart of the woods, for he had a feeling that if they came at him, it would be from the trees.

Presently he heard a crackling farther into the woods. They were searching for him there, not dreaming that the extent of his wounds had chained him to the place to which he had first forced himself.

Somewhere in his body there was a painful pulse, every throb of which was driving life from his body, and he knew that he was fast bleeding to death. He was not sorry for it. It seemed to Lew Melody, as he lay there in the dark, that it was the only way to extricate himself from the frightful tangle of his life; the knot could only be cut. If he had one desire, it was to see the forms of his two last enemies in the sextet come into view and range of his gun.

But that was too much to pray for. Here, in his last and greatest battle, he felt himself dying, and he could not help a certain boyish thrill in the knowledge that the world would talk of this deed long after it had forgotten the better work of better men than himself. He had snuffed out two lives and laid another low and held off three more. It was a comfortable night's work even for Lew Melody!

Another crackling in the brush told him that the pair of hunters had turned back toward the edge of the fire. Hunting as they were hunting, stealthily, with a deadly caution, there was little chance that they would fail to see him before he saw them. He made himself ready to accept a bullet; and, in return, he steadied himself and quickened his nerve to drive an answering bullet back at the jet of fire. A little below the tongue of flame he would direct his own aim, for they would doubtless be stretched along the ground.

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So he waited, with the life ebbing from him at every moment. And a lifetime, I suppose, whirled through his brain with the passage of each second.

Then he heard the noise of Tony Mack—frightfully burned, to judge by his groans—as he dragged himself from the water back toward the dry land—a groan for every breath he drew. Perhaps that rascal had been injured enough to end him with the others. There was a grim satisfaction to Lew Melody in that thought.

There was a new sound, now, a distant muttering like soft thunder which rattles beyond the edge of the horizon. But this grew faster than the noise of any thunderstorm sweeping across the face of the sky. It swelled and whirled closer—the pounding of the hoofs of many horses!

Then, with a great crashing, the cavalcade struck the outskirts of the woods.

"Slim!" said Melody to himself. "But it's too late!"

The meaning of that noise was not lost upon the two hunters in the dark. There began a brisk crackling as they rushed from the brush covert in an opposite direction, and at the same time, the first riders lunged into the dull glow of the firelight which filled the clearing. Lew Melody, turning himself with an infinite labor, saw Juanita—the first rider, on the pinto mare which he had given to her.

"Luis!" she cried.

It was not she whom he wished, but since she had come, he answered faintly: "Here!"

She was at his side in a flash, and men thronging after her—a great dismounting, snorting of horses, creaking of leather, jingling of spurs. He was pleased with these sounds. They came to him as out of a sleepy distance, for a black burden of rest was falling upon his eyes.

The face of Juanita, as she leaned above him, was a dull blur. Only her voice had life and light as she spoke to him. And then her sharp cry of agony.

"Help! He is dying!"

Professional hands took charge of him. Vaguely he recognized the voice of the Mexican doctor. Lights flared up around him. No, he was being carried into the clearing and now he was put down by the fire, which was freshened until it filled the eyes of Lew Melody with yellow lightnings.

Then, from Juanita: "He will live, doctor?"

"I cannot tell," said the doctor. "If he wants to live—perhaps!"

Lew Melody heard no more. He had fallen into a blissful sleep, so it seemed to him—or was it death toward which he sank? No, for he was called back by burning pains. The doctor, with two assistants, was hastily drawing wide, gripping bandages, about his wounds. That pain gathered like a great crescendo of music, and crashed upon his brain.

And he fell into darkness again.

CHAPTER XVI.

MELODY LIVES.

JUANITA was not in the clearing. She had remounted the pinto mare and now she was flying up from the river bottom, and twisting through the thick shadows of the Mexican town, and then the hoofs of her horse struck out an echoing roar from the old bridge that staggered across the Barney River.

Before her glowed the lights of the American section, with its broader streets, and now she was passing through it with the scent of freshly watered lawns coming cool and fragrant upon either side. And now she was beyond those lights of the town and stretching up the weary rise of hills to the east.

The pinto mare, laboring with all her might, seemed to be standing still, and

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the girl flogged her onward remorselessly. So, reeling with weakness, completely run out, the pinto reached the house of Furnival, and the shrilling voice of the girl reached the ears of the sleepers in the house; yes, it passed behind the house and, needlelike, pierced the heavy sleep of the men in the bunk house beyond the main building.

A moment later and Furnival was at the front door. He opened it upon a wild-eyed creature, trembling, and crying to him: "I must see the Señorita Furnival—quickly, oh quickly! It is the life of Don Luis!"

And here was Sandy herself flying down the stairs, already half dressed, and drawing on the last of her clothes and doing buttons with flying fingers.

"They have killed Don Luis—in the river bottom! Six men—and they have killed him, but he will want to see you before he closes his eyes. He is dying, señorita!"

Here were two races and two differing souls face to face, and Sandy was as white and as cool as the Mexican girl was shaken and wailing!

"Will you help me saddle a horse, father?" said she, and was through the door at once.

Furnival, in his nightclothes, followed. It was he who flung the rope that captured the horse; it was she who dragged out saddle and bridle. Between them the animal was instantly ready. And then she was off—no, with the spurs ready to thrust into the flanks of her mount, she stooped to Juanita, standing at her side.

"I understand," said she. "It is more than I could have done for you! God bless you for it!"

Then she was gone.

How she rode that night! I was an eyewitness, for the news from the river bottom had come back on wings to the town, and half of Barneytown was in the saddle, I think—myself among the rest—when a foaming horse flew down the street and some one cried: "Sandy Furnival!"

Like a bolt from the sky, she was past us. I rode as hard as I could, but the thundering hoofs of her horse were on the bridge long before I was there.

I cannot tell how she found her way so straight to the clearing. Perhaps there were other hurrying horsemen already streaming in the same direction, for the whole valley would burn to-morrow with the tale of how Lew Melody had fought six men hand to hand.

But when she stormed into the hollow, she was met by a deadly silence.

"It is death! I am too late!" said Sandy to her own sick heart.

So she slipped from the saddle and ran to the quiet form beside the towering fire, all of whose ruddiness could not relieve the pallor of his face.

His eyes were closed.

"It is death?" whispered Sandy.

"I cannot tell," said the Mexican doctor. "I cannot get the pulse—but there still seems to be a little trace of breath——"

He held the mirror again at the nostrils of Melody.

"Lewis!" said the girl.

And all those who leaned to watch, swore to me afterward that he came far enough back from death in answer to her voice to open his eyes and smile at her.

Of course Lew Melody lived. If he had not, I should never have been able to draw from him more than half of the odd little details with which I have been able to adorn his history. Of course Lew Melody lived, and Sandy married him.

She is coming in this afternoon, for since the death of Mrs. Cheswick, she has led the singing.

But now, as I come toward the end, I wonder what is balanced in this narrative—sorrow or happiness? And has the happiness of the Melodys been great

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enough to counterbalance the anguish which uprooted the Cordobas from their home and sent their three lives south to Mexico?

Sandy still writes to Juanita and hears from her from time to time. Mrs. Cordoba did not live long in Mexico City. And Cordoba himself has failed rapidly. As for the girl herself, twice it seems that she has been prepared for a marriage, and twice something has happened to break off the match. And, though Juanita does not confess what it is, I suppose that by this time we all know.

We look at Lew Melody, grown more brown and prosperous than any of us dreamed possible, and we understand.

THE PROBLEM OF THE SHOW INDIAMS

AMONG the many problems of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles H. Burke, is that of the Indians who seek permission to leave their reservations for the purpose of accepting offers to appear in shows of various kinds. The inducements held out by the showmen are attractive to the Indians, who do not realize that in the long run, it might pay them better to stay at home and cultivate their farms and increase their herds. Another angle on this question is given in the commissioner's latest report in which he says that thousands of Indians from the reservations would be on the road all the time if permission were granted in every case to accept these offers. The report goes on to say:

"Showmen offer constant inducements to the Indians to leave their homes and local means of support for pleasurable attractions of various kinds that usually bring them little or nothing above subsistence, and the managers of which often 'go broke' and leave the Indians stranded hundreds of miles from home."

FEW WOLVES IN ARIZONA

THE latest reports from M. E. Musgrave, State inspector of predatory animal work of the United States Biological Survey, show that wolves have practically been exterminated in that State, and that great headway has been made in controlling the depredations of coyotes, mountain lions, and other marauding animals. When this work was begun in 1918, there were some five hundred gray or lobo wolves in Arizona. Recent investigations show that there are now not more than half a dozen. A close watch has been kept on the border, and no wolf that drifts across the line from old Mexico is permitted to get far. Coyotes and mountain lions are still numerous in some parts of the State, and efforts will be concentrated on reducing to the same condition as the wolves.

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The Trail Home

By James Edward Hungerford

DOWN the ol' trail, with a clickety-click,
Ridin' fer pleasure, an' movin' some quick,
Sittin' a saddle I'm fittin' with ease;
Nothin' to stop me—jest fannin' the breeze!
Little hoss steppin' with pep an' with pride,
Chock full o' happiness that he can't hide!
Nostrils a-flarin', an' eyes shinin' bright,
Eatin' up miles, with a keen appetite!

Gosh, but it's great to be foot-loose an' free!
This is th' life—you kin take it from me!
Far from the jankle an' racket an' noise,
Back in the West, with its pleasures an' joys.
Been on a jaunt fer a sight-seein' trip;
Headin' fer home, with my little clothes grip;
Gone fer a month, but it seems like a year—
An' you kin bet I am glad I am here!

Been to the city to see all the sights,
Gittin' my fill o' the shimmerin' lights;
Herdin' with folks in the cañons o' stone,
Feelin' some lonesome, an' trailin' alone;
Now I am back on the ol' twistin' trail.
This is th' life, an' it never grows stale.
Far from the clatter an' clamor o' men,
Sittin' astride o' a bronc hoss again!

Gulches an' gorges an' mountains an' hills,
Coulees an' cañons an' rivers an' rills.
Beauties o' nature that dazzle the eye—
Here I am willin' to stick till I die!
Sniffin' the perfume o' sweet-scented sage,
Gone fer a month, but it seems like an age!
Breathin' the fragrance o' balsam an' pine—
Here in the heart o' this ol' West o' mine!

Down in the valley, I'm glimpsin' a shack;
Loved ones are waitin' to welcome me back!
Smoke wreathin' up from the chimney o' stone;
No more homesickness, an' trailin' alone!
Eyes are a-shinin', an' pulses athrob.
Glad to be back again, an' on the job.
Heart is a hummin' a song in my breast,
Beatin' in time with the heart o' the West!

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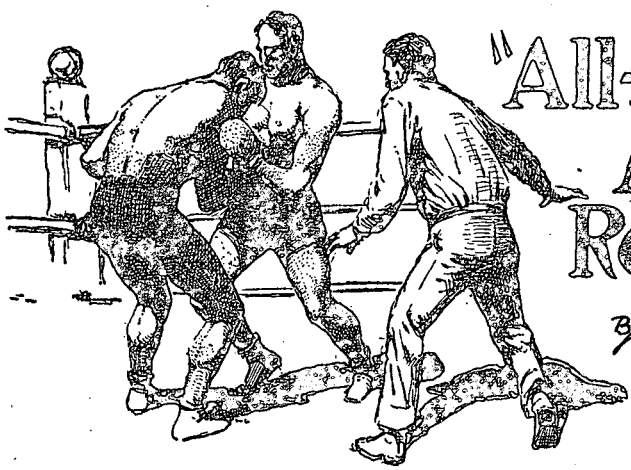

"All-around" Austin Referees

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Another Notch,"

NOW what'll we do?" "Spike" Lambert eyed his manager curiously. It was an important question, for it had to do with Spike's three square meals a day, surely a worthy consideration.

Strand stretched himself and yawned. He had given the matter considerable thought, for Spike was his meal ticket. Now, as he looked at Spike, he spoke straight from the shoulder. "The boxing commission got next to the fake fight we pulled," he said, "and we're barred from the ring. There is only one thing left to do, go out where the West begins, where men are men, and simple. Get that? Where the men are simple."

Spike looked dumbly at his manager. Even his closest friend would never have accused Spike of thinking. Spike's gray matter, such as it was, was used entirely in prize rings.

"Before we go West, Spike, we will have to change your face a bit, for the saps will get wise. You have a cauliflower ear and a nose that looks as though it has stopped a baseball bat or something. I want to take full advantage of that simple face of yours, but if you look too much like a pug, the suckers will smell a rat. So from here we go to the b[illegible], where I have fixed it up for a surgeon to make over that ear and nose. While you are recovering from the operation, I will scout around the West and arrange a few fights. We will take our own referee, of course. All through the West they have round-ups, and boobs come from miles around. Most of the cowboys on the ranches move into town for the round-up week. They should have plenty of money and be easy picking."

Spike tried to look intelligent, and nodded his head. "It sounds good to me, as long as we take our own referee along."

Strand's method was simple. He soon discovered that every community had its local talent, and here and there, some miner, cowboy, or logger stood out as a coming champion in the eyes of his friends. It was Strand's plan to locate the various local prides and, with the help of the referee, stage a contest. Such contests invariably ended in a draw, or else the decision went to the local man, whereupon Strand would loudly voice his protest, accuse the referee of robbing, produce several alibis,

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to the effect that Spike was sick on the day of the contest, or out of condition, and demand another chance. He would then become reckless in his statements, apparently, and offer to back his man with real money. When Spike again met the local champion, he invariably won, after almost losing the fight. It was a sure thing and paid well, in view of the fact that Strand usually had an agent in the crowd covering all side bets. When each community had thus been properly trimmed, Strand, Spike, Frank Holt, the referee, and the agent, moved on to greener fields.

Three weeks before the Frying Pan Sizzle, the annual round-up of which "All-around" Austin was general manager, Strand dropped from the westbound train and looked about. Then he made his way to All-around Austin's general store. He found in All-around Austin a genial soul, typical of the cattle country, who preferred horseflesh to motor cars, and who had a way of looking into a man's eyes so steadily, that unless the man was strictly honest himself, he would invariably look away. Strand got to the point at once.

"They tell me you are running this layout, and that there is going to be a smoker the last night of the round-up."

"That's right," All-around admitted, studying the other shrewdly. All-around Austin knew the type, and was trying to fathom the other's game. If there was to be any trimming done in connection with the round-up, All-around Austin preferred to do it himself.

"I hear you are looking for a man to meet *your* man, Randolph, in the main event," Strand continued. "Understand he is a cow-puncher from the Diamond Hitch Ranch."

"That is true," replied All-around. "But I haven't definitely decided that it will be Randolph. He is a good boy, with a future; that's what the cattle country thinks, but there are a couple of others around here who are not so bad."

"Ever hear of Spike Lambert?" Strand queried.

"It seems like I had," Austin replied. "He beat a big coal miner at Black Diamond, didn't he?"

Strand nodded. "Yes, Lambert is a coal miner himself. He looked pretty good to me, and I thought I might develop him into a pretty good boxer. We are touring around these parts giving him the experience. If you can use him, let me know. However, we must match him against a local man. I don't want him to go up against some ringer and get licked."

All-around Austin frowned. "The West doesn't do business that way," he said coolly.

"What will the purse be?" Strand continued.

"Two thousand dollars for the winner and a thousand dollars for the loser. It is not so very much, but it is all we can stand. We aim to break even on these round-ups; give all the money to the winners of the broncho-bucking contest, the bulldogging, and the like of that."

Strand was a clever fight manager. "My man has the reputation," he said. "Win, lose, or draw, we want the long end. You see, he is the drawing card."

All-around Austin did not look like a fight manager. He looked more like a Western country storekeeper, and he was.

"The drawing card in this affair will be the local man, and not the outsider," he said quickly. "I won't guarantee you a blamed cent, except that the winner will get two thousand dollars and the loser one thousand. Take it or leave it." And All-around Austin busied himself about his store while he cheerfully whistled the "Old Gray Mare."

Presently he tossed a sheet of paper to Strand. "If you want to match your man against ours," he said, "just fill in

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the blanks and sign it. But before you sign it, I want your word of honor that Spike Lambert is not a professional fighter. We had one of those out here, and he cleaned up a nice piece of money. We don't mean to have it happen again."

If there was one thing that Strand did not worry about, it was his word of honor. He smiled disarmingly. "I only wish that Lambert *was* a professional," he said. "I wouldn't be out here in the sticks." With that he signed the blank contract which was witnessed by two cowboys who chanced to be in Austin's store for mail.

"These folks are on the square and soft picking," Strand informed Spike on his arrival. "Nothing clever about them at all."

The next day Spike established training quarters with admission twenty-five cents, and commenced to go through the motions of a daily workout. Each afternoon a critical throng of cowboys gathered to size up the challenger of the local champion.

The second day Dan Devoe drifted in. Dan's legs were long, somewhat bowed, and the chaps he wore proclaimed his profession. He paid his twenty-five cents carelessly, and seated himself on a plank. Of course he was going to back the local man. However, Dan was in love, and it might be well to look the other man over before going the limit, and perhaps losing his entire pile with the result of the postponement of the wedding. At first he was mildly interested, and then a strange glint came into his eyes, and he scratched his head.

"Who is this fellow, Lambert?" he queried.

"A miner from up North," replied a cow-puncher at his side.

"A miner, eh?" he whispered softly. "Well, I've got my two-bits' worth right now."

He sauntered away from Spike's quarters casually enough, but once out of sight, he speeded up, and he did not slacken his pace until he had reached All-around Austin's store.

"All-around," he panted, "for the first time in your life you have been taken in, hook, line, and sinker."

All-around Austin's mildness vanished. He bristled. "I would like to see the color of the man's hair who took me in," he growled out.

"Let's go down and take a look at Strand, Spike Lambert's manager. You know who Spike Lambert really is? Well, he is 'One-round' Conger, who was kicked out of the East. Randolph hasn't a chance with that fellow. I wondered why all the money the boys were putting up on the local man was being covered so quickly. Now I know. It's a sure thing for the other crowd. I've a mind to go down there and clean up on them. You met them square, and they do you dirt. It gets my goat. I'm going out and tell the world about it."

"Now, hold your horses," said All-around Austin. "Give me time to think. I've always claimed that right will triumph in the end. The contract says that Spike Lambert is to meet a local man, either amateur or semi-professional."

All-around grinned. Devoe smiled also.

"It must be good if it makes you smile like that!"

"I have to admit that it ain't so bad," said All-around. "Is that nag of yours any good?"

"There ain't a better horse in the cattle country," said Devoe quickly.

"Then you get right out there, fork him, and see if you can find Rex Dunlap."

Devoe's eyes sparkled. "My idea of an interesting situation would be to have Rex come down here and crawl into the ring, but the trouble is that Rex won't come."

"Rex will come," insisted All-around

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Austin, "particularly if he knows the details. Give him details, and plenty of them. Now, clear out of here. I'm up to my neck in work as it is."

It was two days later that Dan Devoe pulled up in front of a ranch house, which stood, white and silent, in the moonlight. A voice greeted him from the upper window.

"Hello, stranger!"

"Hello yourself," replied Dan. "Where is Rex?"

"Out on the North Range, I guess; probably sleeping under the stars and moon. Who wants him?"

"He is wanted down at the round-up," said Dan, "and he is wanted mighty bad."

"Then they will have to keep wanting him, because Rex don't like crowds. Says he has to have a lot of elbow room."

"I'll take a chance," said Dan. "Loan me a good horse. I have been driving mine pretty hard."

The sun had not yet reached the mountain valley, being content to tint the peaks above it. A horse grazed near a man rolled in blankets. Presently the man stirred and looked around; he got to his feet and stretched himself. Then, as he kicked burned wood together and started his fire, he sang in an atrocious voice and stirred resentful echoes amid the peaks. He was tall, well built, and handsome, but he certainly could not sing.

"My gosh, Rex; stop that singing. It's too nice a morning to spoil."

Rex glanced up abruptly and waved at Dan Devoe, who had quietly appeared on the ridge just above.

"Come on down to breakfast, Dan. How come you are stirring so early in the morning? I didn't think anything could keep you away from the round-up."

"I came up here to get you, and I mean to take you back with me."

Rex shook his head, and Dan Devoe squared off to ride roughshod over the other, even if he took a beating for it.

"Now, listen to me, Rex," he said. "You are a blamed fool to mope around up here just because a pretty girl couldn't see her way clear to becoming Mrs. Rex. The old-fashioned way of doing was to mope around. Now days, the fellow grabs another girl. There is only one thing to make a man forget a girl, and that is another girl. Take a man's advice who has been a bachelor for thirty years, and knows all about such things."

Dan Devoe explained the situation despite Rex's lack of interest. "And if you don't come down there," he concluded, "a lot of hard-earned, cow-country dollars are going to find their way into Spike Lambert's pocket." Rex, apparently, began to weaken. "And, furthermore, every cowman on the range swears by you. Now will you come?"

"Yes, I will," replied Rex, with sudden decision, "on the boys' account."

"But you are coming on your own account too, because Spike Lambert is Conger!"

Rex let out a yell of pure joy that could have been heard at Frying Pan above the excitement of the round-up. "Spike Lamber, or One-round Conger, as he was known in the East, sneaked out on me. He claimed he broke his hand, got a cinder in his eye, or something. Fate has sure been sweet to me to-day. Come on, let's eat and drift to Frying Pan before something happens."

"Are you in pretty good shape?" ventured Dan.

Rex merely winked. He trained daily for the sheer joy of feeling good. It was evident that managing a huge ranch did not occupy all his time.

It was dusk when Rex Dunlap rode into Frying Pan and trouble.

An unusually pretty girl was just

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emerging from All-around Austin's general store. A round-up brings people from every corner of the earth, and it was evident that she was out of her element, though intensely interested in the throng.

She made her way unobtrusively down the street. A thick-shouldered individual followed, and when she turned off, overtook her with quick strides.

"Hello, girlie," he said, "I guess me and you are the only regular people in this burg. Suppose we look it over together?"

"Suppose we don't!" she replied, and turned to go.

"Just a moment," he objected. She glanced around apprehensively, with the hope of avoiding a scene. Only one person was in sight—a tall cow-puncher, right from the range. He approached with long, quick strides.

"Men don't follow ladies around in this country!" he said.

Spike squared off. "I guess you don't know who I am!" he growled out, and then he followed his words with a blow at the sunburned jaw.

The other feinted, caught him off guard, and smacked his fist to the jaw. After about ten seconds, Spike commenced to squirm around in the dust and wonder if the stars twinkling overhead were real or caused by the blow. The girl was looking at the cowboy in open-mouthed amazement.

"Rex Dunlap, where on earth did you come from?" she cried.

"Just rode into town and nearly fell off my horse when I saw you going down the street. Naturally, I followed."

"Come quick, Rex," she said nervously, "this man is a prize fighter. I just recognized him a moment ago. When he regains his senses he will just about kill you."

"Well," drawled Rex, "he had a right smart chance, and didn't take it!" But for other reasons, he took the girl's arm and hurried from the scene. "I am tickled to death to see you, but it's going to open up the old hurt again. I guess I'm not good at forgetting a girl. For two cents I would get rough and pack you off to the ranch, right now. Once I thought you cared a little bit. I had no business to think so, I suppose."

"Yes, you did," she replied, "because I led you to think so."

"Hang it! When I asked you, you said no!"

"Because I wasn't sure of myself, and because I wanted time to think." Just a trace of bitterness crept into her tone. "I have had two years to think it over—two years in which to realize that a man of your type never speaks idle words; he means just what he says."

In his blissful ignorance, the big cowboy credited the meeting to luck, but the girl knew otherwise. It was ten per cent luck and ninety judgment on her part. It was not the first round-up that her heart had led her to.

Spike Lambert was in a black mood.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded his manager.

"Nothing," growled Spike. "The moment I settle with this Randolph, I'm going out and punch a big stiff of a cow-puncher, that put it over on me when I was trying to date up the girl you saw me follow out of the post office."

Strand was not interested particularly in Spike's brawl. Spike could take care of himself.

"Randolph is out and a man named Dunlap takes his place," he explained. "He is a rancher up here, and dubs around with the gloves for the fun of it. It is the best thing that ever happened. These poor saps think he is good, and they have emptied their socks of their last cent."

All-around Austin hailed them as they passed his store. "Come and meet that Dunlap. He got in from the range last night."

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Austin might have added that Dunlap had spent most of the evening and all of the morning with a rather attractive young woman, and that he did not seem to be particularly interested in the coming bout. Spike and manager entered the store.

"Mr. Dunlap, shake hands with Mr. Lambert and Mr. Strand," said All-around.

There was a trace of a smile on Dunlap's face as he extended his hand to Spike. "I think Mr. Lambert and I have met before," he remarked pointedly.

Spike grasped the cowboy's hand mechanically, then dropped it. "Yes," said Spike, "we have met before, and we are going to meet again."

Only Dunlap got the full significance of the remark. He nodded cheerfully and turned away. "See you later, Lambert," he remarked.

Strand whistled. "My gosh!" he exclaimed. "Dunlap is wise to who you are, and still is willing to meet you."

Strand hurried away in search of the referee.

"Find out all you can about this fellow, Dunlap," he directed the referee. "Keep your mouth shut. He is wise as to Spike, and yet is willing to meet him. Do you suppose it is possible some man in the cow country can really fight with his fists?"

"Anything is possible," replied Holt. "Leave it to me; don't forget, I am referee. I have bet three thousand on Spike, and I don't intend to lose it."

Holt hurried to investigate, and, three hours before the fight, his worst fears were realized. He needed air, so he took Strand out on the desert in his car, where there was plenty of air but no listening ears.

"There is only one thing to be done," he said, "and that is to call off all bets. This fellow, Dunlap, is either a fool or has learned to box somewhere. I never saw a more confident crowd in my life."

Strand groaned. "Why, there are thousands of dollars involved. It looked like a cinch to clean up big!"

"And there is an even chance it is a cinch we will lose every cent we've got. We have played sure things thus far, and we are going to continue to do so. Leave it to me. I am referee, and what I say goes!"

The bout was held in the open, beneath the glare of arc lights. The spectators were seated on bleachers, with the exception of twenty rows about the ring. Every seat was filled with keen-eyed, sun-tanned men. No better or fairer sportsmen stood in shoe leather.

When Spike Lambert entered the ring, they cheered him, and a few over-enthusiastic cowboys punctured the air with their six-guns and added to the din. Two minutes later, Rex Dunlap climbed through the ropes. The roar was deafening, for there were few men of the range who did not count Rex as a personal friend. Almost to a man they were broke, every cent they could rake and scrape having been placed on Rex.

Spike Lambert was introduced, shook hands with himself, hands overhead, and bowed to the crowd with the short, jerky nod of a professional. Then he seated himself and glared across the ring at Rex. The latter sensed a bitter contest. Here was an old hand who knew every crooked trick of the ring, and would bring it into play in order to win. Yet, Rex was confident he would eventually win.

It was at this point that the referee cleared his throat. "Ladies and gentlemen," he announced. "A lot of ugly rumors have been going around that this fight is fixed. I know that Spike Lambert is honest, and I know that Rex Dunlap is on the square, but to settle these rumors, I now declare all bets off!"

The referee's roving eye met that of

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a hard-looking range man. The latter was drawing a .44, the barrel of which to the referee seemed fully a yard long.

"I ain't heard no rumors," interrupted the cowboy, "at least not any rumors that we are worried about, and I don't aim to have you call off any bets."

For just a moment the referee stood his ground. Never in his life had he seen so much artillery at one time. Everywhere he looked, the butts of guns protruded from holsters. In fact, there were more guns than there were neckties in the audience.

"And, furthermore," continued the cowboy, "if you wear glasses in your refereeing, dust them off and dust them plenty. Savvy?" He tapped the butt of the .44 with almost reverence.

The referee's throat was dry. Somehow he felt that he had just kissed three thousand dollars good-by. He turned to the timekeeper. "Let her go," he announced, and the gong rang.

Spike Lambert leaped across the ring like a panther. He hated them all, the crowd, the men with the mark of open spaces stamped on their faces, who talked in terms of square dealing, and, above all, he hated his opponent. The weight of his attack caused Dunlap to give ground, yet Spike's vicious punches were met skillfully. Surprised, he clinched, and when the crowd could not see, he resorted to tactics barred in the ring. A moment later Spike broke away with haste. Here was a man who knew his own game.

When the gong sounded, neither had any distinctive advantage. Dan Devoe was in high glee.

"When this fight is over with, I will have enough to build a house on my land; then wedding bells for me."

He sponged off Dunlap's face and shoulders in a manner indicating experience, whispered a few words of advice, then slapped him on the back, as the gong sounded for the second round.

Rex Dunlap did not win the next round or the next; he barely held his own, and a fortune hung in the balance repeatedly. Yet it was a contest such as men seldom see, and then the tide turned. Long hours in the open, sleeping on the ground, winter and summer, clean living—had turned the tide.

Spike fought with his back to the wall, and a blow of desperation somehow reached the spot. Dunlap was down. With a cry of joy the referee leaped forward and commenced to count. He reached the count of nine in less than five seconds, but the "ten" died in his throat as Dunlap gathered his will power and struggled to his feet. It was raw—an outrage—for it denied the range man the right of those precious seconds of recovery.

An angry roar came from the crowd; the referee paled as several men started to crawl through the ropes. All-around Austin waved them back, but crawled through the ropes himself. As the battle continued, Austin thrust the referee from the ring.

"I quit!" the official muttered nervously. "I'm through!"

"You bet you're through!"

The gong sounded and the contestants walked to their corners. All-around Austin knew none of the fine points of the ring game, but his education in square dealing was extensive. He lifted his hand, and the throng became silent.

"Spike Lambert had his own personal referee for five rounds," he announced, "and he got away with everything but murder. He almost got away with the fight. I don't know much about refereeing, but I've a sneaking idea of what's square. The fight will go on. When I say break, I want you men to break. I don't aim to pry you apart, and the man who hangs on will lose the fight. I've got a stop watch, and from now on the count will be ten full seconds when any man is on the canvas. I'm going to squat down in that corner and look a

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lot. If I don't like what's going on, I'll act according."

The gong rang, and Strand sent his man from his corner with a rush; then he slipped around and tried to talk to Austin.

"Look here!" he cried angrily.

All-around kept his eyes on the men. "If you've got anything to say, write a letter, and I'll answer."

Failing to divert the referee's attention long enough to slip something over, he resorted to an old trick of the ring. Between rounds he sprinkled a dab of powder on Spike's gloves.

"Now play for his eyes, and when that stuff works in, you'll have things your own way."

Spike, badly worried, took new hope when he left his corner. For a time he boxed, until at length he shot in a swift one squarely over Dunlap's eye. It was a tap, and yet——

In all his years on the range none remembered seeing Dunlap lose his temper. They saw his face twist suddenly from the agony of that eye; then a rage as cold as the breath of the arctic seemed to grip him. The crowd stood up as one. It saw Spike measure his almost blind opponent and strike a clean blow. It should have dropped the range man in his tracks, but he shook it off and cast discretion aside. Fear gripped Spike.

"He didn't drop!" he muttered, and retreated. "He——" Spike swung and missed, and the world became black.

Rex Dunlap did not glance back, as in a trance he heard All-around Austin toll off the count over the prostrate Spike, heard Strand's frantic pleas for him to rise. All he could think of was relief from pain.

While Dan Devoe bathed his eyes, several men carried Spike from the ring. The roar of joyous .44s splitting the night was deafening. It should have awakened even Spike, but it did not. Strand hurried over to the stakeholder.

"We protest! Hold all bets; I'm going to take this into court! An armed man refereed the fight, and——"

All-around Austin overheard the remark and led Strand from the scene.

"Some men don't know when they are well off," he said. "You tried to rob a lot of hard-working cow-punchers, and didn't get away with it because the range had a man that could beat you at your own game. Your ringer was recognized right off the bat. Take an old-timer's advice before those mavericks out there lose their tempers and begin to yell for raw meat. You'd better pay your debts and then get out of town. Hear those six-guns. Don't that mean something?"

Apparently they did; a barking six-gun is eloquent in argument.

SAVES THE GOVERNMENT'S FISH.

ALFRED HENSEL, a farmer who lives near Filley, Nebraska, is using a large tank at his home in lieu of a fish pond on his farm which went dry in the fall. About a year ago the government placed the fish in the pond, and when the pond went dry because of the long period without rain in this section of the State, hundreds of the fish were seen floundering about in the mud. Hensel thought it was his duty to save them, after the government agents had gone to the trouble and expense of stocking the pond, so he transferred them to a large water tank near his windmill. He intends to keep them alive until spring and then restore them to the pond.

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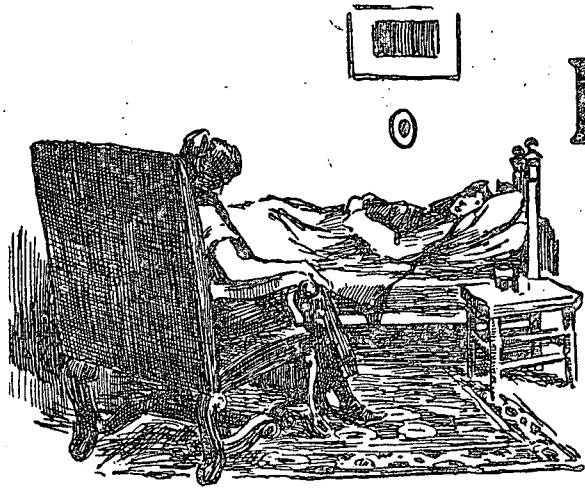

Purple Loco

By Charles Wesley Sanders

Author of "Trouble Range," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

TOM PAIGE learns of the murder of Harry Comstock, and he comes into the country to track down the murderer. In the meantime, he meets Ruth Denny, who is in distress. Tom rides to the nearest town for Doctor Raymond, for Ruth's younger brother is ill, and the doctor diagnoses the case as pneumonia, although Tom has his suspicions that the case is merely one of influenza.

Ruth asks Tom to remain at the ranch long enough to break an outlaw horse which she wishes to sell to one Cal Saulsbury. This Tom does, and, incidentally, he meets Saulsbury and incurs the latter's disfavor.

Tom pays a visit to Peter Larkin, deputy sheriff, to ascertain certain facts regarding the murder of Harry Comstock, and Larkin takes offense. Larkin and Saulsbury conspire to order Tom out of the country. Tom, however, has promised to help Ruth with a cattle drive in the absence of her brother, Joe Denny, and he has no intention of complying with their demand.

In the meantime, Tom goes to "Old Man" Herman, the prospector with whom Harry Comstock was partner when he was murdered. The old prospector tells Tom the location of his mining claim, and Tom starts out into the hills. He comes upon two men, one apparently acting as lookout, while the other is at work with a pickax. To his amazement he discovers the latter to be no other than Ruth's absent brother. From Eddie Denny, the young brother, Tom learns that Joe is double crossing Herman, and that he is a worthless fellow. Tom promises to do all in his power to straighten matters out, for Ruth's sake.

When Tom and Ruth are on the cattle drive a few days later, they meet Cal Saulsbury and Larkin, who threaten Tom and order him to turn back, offering to assist Ruth in getting the cattle to the destination. Tom calmly offers to shoot it out with either or both of them.

Tom discovers a ruse by which the "Mex" employee of Saulsbury has tried to ambush and kill him. Tom surprises the Mex and hog-ties him, but during the night an accomplice of the Mexican sets him free.

Tom wastes no further time tracking down the Mexican, but proceeds with the drive. When his duties as trail boss are ended, he returns to the hills to confront Joe Denny. He finds him dead, with a bullet in his heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

SIGNS.

FORTUNATELY, Tom Paige had a mind which was capable of an orderly arrangement of details. He began at once now to attempt to reconstruct the events which had culminated in the death of Joe Denny. Instead, then, of beginning an examination in the immediate vicinity of the body, he went on up the gulch, hugging the wall of it so that he would not confuse any signs which Joe had left.

This brought him to the place where Joe had last been working. First he found a pick and a shovel leaning against the rocky wall. Doubtless Joe had placed them there when he had quit work shortly before dark the evening before. Tom, examining the wall, saw that Joe had made a determined

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attack there. He had cut a hole in the rock, and Tom guessed that he had been going to blow it out in the hope of finding the vein for which he had been searching. Tom knew nothing about hunting for gold, and he had a notion now that Joe had known no more. The man had worked as if he had thought he might uncover a yellow vein close up to the surface of the rock. Then probably the idea of blasting had come to him. It was possible, Tom saw, that he had been going out of the gulch to procure explosives when he had been shot. In any event, Tom had a feeling now that all the work which Joe had done had been the fruitless work of an ignorant man. Thoughts of gold had obsessed him, confused him, and he had made no plans. He had merely attacked.

Three feet out from the wall Tom now found the remains of a fire. This, he discovered, had been out for a long time. It was burned away in the center, and some of the charred sticks were damp, where Joe had doused them with water.

Next Tom hunted along the wall till he found a depression in it. From this he drew a roll of bedding, and inside the bedding he found Joe's coat. Therefore he judged that Joe had gone down the gulch in the early evening. He had not prepared his bed, and he had not even got out his coat against the chill of the evening.

This much established, Tom walked slowly down the gulch toward its mouth. Once he came to a spot where sand had drifted for a space of perhaps six feet. He judged that there was water beneath the rocky floor, seeping up from it, for the sand was damp, and in this dampness were footprints. He knelt to these and decided from their spread that Joe had been running when he had struck for the outside.

Tom stood up and considered that. It was almost certain that Joe had not been running away from anything. He had had his gun, and his training had been such that he would have stood to fight if he had been threatened with attack back there. Then he must have been running toward something. It was possible that the guard had got into a fight at the mouth of the gulch, and Joe, hearing shots, had run out to his assistance. If that were so, however, what had happened to the guard? Had some one killed both him and Joe, and if so, where was the guard's body?

Tom hastened along the gulch, passed Joe, and came outside. He hunted on each side for some distance, but he found no other body. He did find where some one had made a fire, but this was out, and had been so for so long a time as Joe's fire had been out, Tom judged. Tom searched all about the dead fire, but he could find nothing which had belonged to the guard. What few utensils he had were gone, as well as the blankets he must have used, and his coat.

With a certain suspicion deepening in his mind, he returned to Joe's body. Between the mouth of the gulch and the spot where Joe's body lay, he could find no sign. Joe had apparently gone this far in his outward flight and had been stopped there by a bullet. Whoever had shot him had not come in to examine his body.

Tom remembered then how he had seen the guard at the right-hand side of the mouth of the gulch. He went straight out now, and there circled in to this spot. Here again there was damp sand, and in it were footprints. They started at the edge of the sand and came up to the other edge of it. They were close together, and Tom inferred from that that their maker had been moving forward slowly, with the utmost caution. Then came the decisive sign. At the very edge of the damp sand there was the imprint of a man's knee. Over against it was the imprint of a man's

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sole, with no imprint of the heel. Tom could read that clearly. The man had knelt on one knee and had leaned forward; thus resting on the knee and the sole of the other foot. Had he heard Joe running, crouched down, and been ready to fire? That seemed probable.

Tom now returned to the body. He took up the gun and examined it. He found that it had been fired three times. That indicated that Joe had returned the fire of the other man. Probably he had been fired upon once and had not been hit. He had wheeled to confront the man and had been shot in the breast. He had gone down, and his attacker had fled.

"It'd look," was Tom's conclusion, "as if that guy hadn't been workin' with Joe after all. I reckon he was just watchin' him. Joe come runnin' out, and the guy plugged him. Joe was runnin'. Ain't no question about that. Mebbe that guy thought he had found gold and didn't want him to get outside and tell anybody."

He stood looking down at Joe's upturned face for a moment. Joe, in death, looked younger than Tom surmised that he was. Tom guessed that hard work and the excitement of his hunt had worn him down somewhat, for his face was thin. It had a lean look, a cleaner, healthier look than it usually wore, Tom was sure. It was not an evil-looking face now, either. Perhaps death had refined it, restored some of its lost boyishness to it. It had not, of course, the look which was in Ruth's face, but there was a resemblance, nevertheless.

"Well, old-timer, you paid the price, didn't you?" Tom said sadly. "I don't think you knowed half the time what you was doin'. You had kinda lost your grip on things, but it seems like they have collected a little more than you owed."

He went to Silver and led him back to the body and then he tied the body on Silver's back. He would take the dead man and get Doctor Raymond to come out and see just how he had been killed. He could get to the Denny ranch before sunup, and possibly could get the doctor out there before Ruth arrived. She would probably not be home till toward noon.

His face softened as he thought of the girl. This would be a bitter blow for her. Joe had made her suffer in his life, and now he would make her suffer by his untimely and violent death. And the task of breaking the news to her would be Tom's. He did not, however, shrink from that. He was glad in a way that it was so. No one, he was sure, would tell her more gently.

The moon had gone by the time he reached the ranch house and the darkness before the dawn was over the land. He tied Silver so that he should not move with his gruesome burden, and walked toward the house. It was in darkness as he had known it would be, and he rapped on the kitchen door. The door was presently opened by Eddie. He stood looking down at Tom for a moment and then fear shot into his eyes.

"Has something happened to Ruth?" he asked.

"No," Tom answered. "It's Joe, Eddie."

Relief came to the boy's eyes, and then fear suddenly clouded them again.

"Has he done somethin'—somethin' awful mebbe?" he asked.

Tom stepped up on the threshold and put his arm across Eddie's shoulders.

"No, he hasn't done anything, son," he said quietly. "He is past doin' anything to anybody—or to himself."

Eddie shivered violently and leaned against Tom for a moment. Then he slowly straightened up.

"Does Ruth know?" he asked.

"Not yet," Tom answered. "I left her at Logan's. We've got to take care

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of Joe, Eddie—get him to lookin' as decent as we can, you know, before she comes home."

"We got to work fast, then," Eddie said. "It's comin' mornin'."

"I'll bring Joe in," Tom said. "Then I'll go into town and get Raymond out here and an undertaker. It there an undertaker there?"

"Why, there is a man that does that kind of work for Raymond," Eddie said. "We—we will have to get a coffin at the county seat."

"I'll take care of everything," Tom promised. "I'll bring Joe in now. You won't be afraid to stay here with him, will you?"

"I won't be afraid," Eddie answered.

Tom returned to Silver and bore the body inside. Eddie walked behind him and stood beside the cot in the living room when Tom put the body down and covered it with a blanket which was lying there.

"Where's Herman?" Tom asked.

"Upstairs asleep," Eddie replied. "He don't do much but sleep. He don't eat nothin', and he ain't got nothin' to say."

"I'll start," Tom said. "You get your clothes on. It'll be day before long, and then it won't be so bad."

"I'm not afraid," said the boy steadily. "Somethin' was goin' to happen to Joe, both me and Ruth knowed. We was afraid of somethin' worse than this."

Tom nodded. He gripped the boy's shoulder and then he went out to Silver.

The sun was coming up when he rode into the little village. He went directly to Raymond's office and knocked on the door. Raymond, he supposed, slept back of the office, and this proved to be so. The doctor roused quickly like one used to be roused at any hour, and he opened the door to Tom. He looked down at him with a cold light of distaste suddenly leaping into his sleepy eyes.

"Well?" he snapped out.

"Joe Denny is dead," Tom said. "Been murdered, looks like. I want you to go out there and bring with you the man that works for you in such cases. I heard you had such a man."

He had not, of course, known how Raymond would act. He felt that the doctor could scarcely refuse to accompany him. He was not prepared for the manner in which Raymond took the news, however. Raymond's face suddenly blanched and the light in his eyes died. He was as stricken, Tom thought, as if Joe Denny had been some one near to him.

He put out both hands and laid them rather uncertainly on the door jamb, and his fingers clawed at the wood before they were suddenly still in a strong, steadying pressure.

"Joe Denny?" he said. "Dead? Murdered? Who did it?"

"I don't know. I found him alone up in the gulch. He had been shot; looked like he had been shot through the heart."

Raymond gazed at him for a moment. Then he took his hands from the door jamb and straightened up. His face took on a more normal color, and then a look of cunning came into it.

"*You* found him up in the gulch?" he said.

While he had been riding into town, Tom had been turning many things over in his mind. He had had time to think of all the men he had met since he had come to this country. He had thought of this man, of Saulsbury, of Larkin, of the Mexican, of Peters, the ranch hand, of the man who had been on guard.

"Thank heaven," he had said, "that I got a good look at that fella. I'll be huntin' for him right away."

As he had neared town he had forced himself to stop thinking of Ruth, to whom his mind had inevitably reverted. He had seen that he must keep himself alert. He was still looking for

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a sign, but it was a sign, he knew now, which he must find in a human face. He would be searching the face of every man he met from now on. He would be listening for tones. He must be ready to seize any little thing which came his way, for he had a feeling that what might finally direct his steps toward a solution of the death of Joe Denny and of the death of Harry, would be some trifle.

So now he watched Raymond, and he weighed his words. There had been that emphasis on the "you." What did that mean?

"*You* found him up in the gulch?"

It sounded accusatory. Also, it indicated that Raymond had known that Joe was in the gulch. That might be important. Raymond had expressed no surprise at the finding of Joe's body in that lonely spot. He had not asked: "What gulch?"

"I found the body," Tom said quietly. "Up in the gulch. Up in the gulch by the waterfall. You knowed Joe was workin' up there, didn't you?"

Again that sudden pallor struck the color from Raymond's face. "I didn't," he declared passionately. "I did not!"

CHAPTER XXII.

CRUMBS OF COMFORT.

TOM thrilled as Raymond uttered his vehement disclaimer. He perceived that he had got hold of something, but he also perceived that he must not let Raymond know it. Raymond's denial had been far better than a cool affirmation. If he had said, without show of emotion, that he had known that Joe Denny had been in the gulch, Tom would have seen that he had nothing to conceal. But when he tried to say, in this positive utterance, that he had no such knowledge, Tom knew that he was lying. And if he were lying, he had something to conceal beyond the mere knowledge.

Swiftly Tom dissembled. He raised his face to Raymond's and nodded slowly.

"I just thought mebbe you had heard that Joe was up there huntin' for gold," he said. "News of gold hunts gets about fast sometimes. Seems to get into the air and be blowed here and there."

Raymond's body seemed to shrink as he slowly exhaled. The blood flowed back into his face and with it came an expression of great relief.

"You say you don't know who killed Denny?" he asked.

"Haven't got the slightest idea."

"You didn't pick up a clew of any kind?"

"Not a clew. Whoever had killed him had faded away, leavin' nothin'. Denny's gun was near him. That was all."

"How near?"

Tom understood what that question meant. Already, he believed, Raymond was preparing to show, if possible, that Denny had killed himself. Tom was sure now that Raymond knew the man who had been on guard at the mouth of the gulch. Just possibly he had something to do with his being there.

"Why, the gun," Tom said, "was just beyond his hand."

"Ah," said Raymond, and then a certain briskness came into his manner. "Well," he went on, "I'll go with you, of course. Take me just a minute to get ready. Will you come in?"

Tom stepped into the room. While Raymond was getting ready, he asked: "How does Miss Denny take it?"

"She doesn't know," Tom answered. "Me and her took some cattle over to Logan's to be winter fed. She hasn't got home."

"It was to be expected that Denny would come to some kind of a bad end," Raymond said. "He was a bad actor when he had been drinking. Always looking for a quarrel."

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"Who'd he ever quarrel with?" Tom asked with an air of innocence, and he saw Raymond glance at him quickly.

"Oh, I heard he quarreled with Larkin and Saulsbury. In fact, he and Saulsbury had a fight a while back. Saulsbury beat Joe up."

"What was that about?"

"I didn't hear. Well, I'm ready. I'll get my horse and we will stop and pick up that other man."

The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the Denny ranch house. Eddie met them at the door, and Tom looked at him anxiously.

"She hasn't come home yet," Eddie said.

"That's good," Tom said. He drew Raymond to one side. "I'd like to have the bullet that killed Joe Denny," he said.

"I'll get it for you if I can," Raymond promised.

Tom and Eddie sat down in the kitchen while the two men went into the other room. When they had finished their work and had returned, Raymond nodded to Tom and Tom followed him outside.

"There's the bullet," Raymond said. He held the piece of lead out to Tom, and Tom examined it.

"I reckon that won't give us no clew," Tom said.

"No; it might have been fired from any forty-five. It's the kind of bullet everybody uses here abouts, when he uses a gun at all. Gun play isn't so common. Gunmen aren't common either."

"No," Tom said, "they're not."

"Perhaps," said Raymond, "I had better remain till Miss Denny gets back. She may need medical assistance."

It was hard for Tom not to show dislike when he felt it as keenly as he felt it toward Raymond. His lip curled slightly in spite of his intention not to disclose his true feelings toward this man.

"I don't think she will need any medical attention," he said. "She is a good, strong girl. This will be a blow to her, but I'm thinkin' that the fewer people there are about when she gets the news the better she will like it."

"Perhaps so," Raymond assented. "Her brother can tell her."

Tom knew that Raymond wanted him to say that *he* was going to tell Ruth, but Tom would not say it. Raymond, he saw, was probing to discover whether he and Ruth were so intimate as to lead Tom to accept the sad task of informing her of Joe's death.

"Eddie's a good boy," Tom said noncommittally.

The two men rode away, and Tom returned to the kitchen.

"How're you feelin', son?" he asked.

"I'm all right," Eddie answered with a brave upfling of his head.

"I'll ride up the road and meet your sister," Tom said. "She ought to be showin' up before long. It will be better if she has a little time after I tell her before she reaches the house."

"Yes," Eddie answered, consenting.

Tom mounted Silver and rode away. When he came to a point where he could see the road for some distance, he halted the horse and waited. He had to wait for nearly an hour before he saw riders approaching, kicking up a little cloud of dust.

He started Silver toward them, moving slowly. The riders soon defined themselves as Ruth and two men, and one of these men presently proved to be Logan. Tom forced a cheerful look to his face as he drew near them. Ruth smiled at him. She looked rested, and Tom supposed that she was relieved that the cattle had been safely driven to Logan's.

"Did you think I was never coming home?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," Tom answered, "but Silver and I thought we needed a little exercise, and so we rode out here."

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She glanced at the horse, and anxiety, never far below the surface, showed in her face. Tom knew, without looking at the horse, that he did not appear as if he needed exercise. He appeared more as if he needed a rest. He was standing with drooping head. Tom was aware, too, that his own face must be drawn and tired. However, he did not try to disarm Ruth of the suspicion that something had happened. He did not smile. He knew that she would see that the smile was not genuine, and besides, he did not want to lift her up and then cast her suddenly down. She was prepared for bad news of some kind now, and his most merciful course would be to break the news to her as soon as possible.

"I'll take Miss Denny home now," he told Logan soberly. "I'd like to speak to you a minute, though."

Tom knew that Logan, too, sensed that there was trouble in the air. Men like Logan, because of their business, become watchful, quick to grasp that important news is about to be imparted.

Without a word Logan turned his horse and went back along the road. Tom following him. As he passed Ruth, she fixed grave eyes on his face.

"I'll be back in just a minute," he said.

He told Logan briefly what had happened, and Logan only nodded with set face through the recital. He asked no unnecessary questions.

"One thing you got to look out for," he said as Tom finished, "an' that is that you don't get caught up in this thing yourself. You have made enemies. You found the body; you was alone. Your word may be questioned. I'm ridin' back to my place. I'll get some men together back there. Have them on call. If you get into trouble here, ride for my ranch. I will back you up. I'm takin' it from Ruth that you are a square shooter."

"I'll remember," Tom said.

Logan called to the other man, who joined him, and they rode away. Tom, with his heart like lead in his breast, returned to Ruth. It had not occurred to him that he might shirk the task of telling her. He had accepted the task because he had found Joe's body, and because he believed that he could give her the story quickly and fully and have it done with.

Grave eyes were on grave eyes as he stopped Silver beside her horse. Even the buckskin seemed to sense that there was something in the air. Woman hater though he was, he was not disturbed by Ruth's nearness. He could easily have turned and nipped at her, but he stood still, his head down.

"What is it?" Ruth asked, and the only sign of emotion she gave outside of her gravity was a slow intake of her breath.

"I've got bad news, ma'am," Tom said, taking off his hat and holding it against his chest.

She looked at the hat. His removal of it and the way he held it seemed to hint at tragedy, as if he were even then in the presence of death.

"Has something happened to Eddie?" she whispered, and her body quivered.

"Not to Eddie," he answered. "To Joe."

Fear dilated her eyes and drove the color out of her face. Tom knew how she felt. Here was not only the shock of harm having come to her elder brother; there was the accumulated effect of long days and nights of apprehension. Joe had been the unknown quantity in her life. She had had the terrible prescience of disaster for him sooner or later.

"He has killed some one," she said.

He saw then that he might have been the bearer of more shocking tidings than he did bear. Her fear had been that Joe would become a murderer in one of those attacks of rage which Tom had come to see he had been a victim of.

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So he understood that this was the moment to tell her the truth. She would find a kind of relief in the actuality as against the possibility.

"He hasn't killed anybody," he said. "He himself has been killed."

He perceived that there was a kind of relief in it for her. She raised her left hand and drew it slowly across her eyes. When she drew the hand away there were tears in the eyes, the quick tears of grief, those tears which relieve pain.

"How was it?" she asked. "Tell me."

He told her everything there was to tell, except his suspicion of Raymond and Raymond's readiness to cast suspicion on himself.

"You think he was sober at the time?" she asked. "He must have been sober, Tom."

"I'm sure he hadn't had a drink since he went up into the gulch," Tom declared. "He had something else on his mind. He was hunting for gold, and that took away any other desire he might have had. He—well, his face looked younger than I had expected it to look. It looked clean, too, as if—well, I dunno—as if mebbe something had been wiped out of it."

"I'm so glad for that," she said. "There were times when he looked old, very old—when he came home, you know, after having been away."

"Yes," Tom said.

She lifted her head, but her tears came in a flood then. They rolled down her cheeks for a while unnoticed, and then she brushed them away and fought back those that would have followed.

"I'll go home now," she said.

They rode to the ranch house in silence.

"I'll take care of the horses," Tom said. "Shall I call Eddie first?"

"I'll wait for you," she said.

He saw that, strong as she was, she wanted some one to lean on. She had no one except Eddie and himself, and she had chosen him. He had a feeling that she understood him, read him. She knew, he was sure, that his only hope was to serve her, to help her. He could not analyze his own feelings toward her now, except that he knew that it was no feeling of love. It transcended love. He did not even pity her. If the occasion had been different, he would have gloried in her. But it was not that either. He thought it was a kind of worship. He had been in few churches, and those few had been humble places. He had never even seen a cathedral. So he could make no comparison in that way, but if he had been able to make it, he might have said he felt as he would have felt if he had been seated in some great dim building and had heard the magnificent music of some vast organ touched by a master.

So he returned to her where she waited, and there must have been something of this in his plain, bronzed face; for she looked at him and then she put out her hands to him; and he took them and held them briefly. Then they went inside.

Eddie, his eyes on his sister's face, curiously, as if he sought his cue from her, rose and approached her. Tom could not take his fascinated eyes from her face. She only smiled and put her hands on Eddie's shoulders. The boy's head went up, and the face upon which the shadow of undefined emotion had heavily lain, lightened.

"You've still got me, Ruth," he said.

She nodded.

"Stay here," she said, and she opened the door and went into the other room.

As if her departure shook the boy's courage, he left the room hastily and went out of doors. Tom stood waiting for Ruth's return.

She came out presently, opening the door slowly, groping her way through it and closing it behind her, her handkerchief to her eyes.

A choking pity came to the man. He

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went to her and put his arm across her shoulders. She leaned against him and wept.

At last she lifted her head and slowly disengaged herself.

He placed a chair for her, and she sank into it and he sat beside her. She wiped away the traces of her tears, and no more tears came. He was surprised at the steadiness of her voice when she spoke.

"There is no question but that my brother was murdered?" she asked. "He—he didn't——"

"No, he didn't kill himself," Tom said. "He was murdered."

He reconstructed the scene for her as he had reconstructed it for himself, for he saw that she would be better off if he removed any doubt from her mind. If Joe had destroyed himself, his end would have been akin to the greater crime which she had feared he might some day commit.

"And you have no idea who killed him?" she asked.

He hesitated on that. And then he decided that he would tell her everything he knew. He was aware that doubts and recurring questions would only torment her. Unless he could convince her that Joe had been murdered, the fear that he had killed himself would recur to her. What she needed was a clear vision.

So he told her about his other visits to the gulch. He described minutely the man who had been on guard. He was able to do this, because the picture of that man was graven on his mind now. Every feature which he had noted stood out distinctly. It was as if the man stood in strong sunlight near him.

"Why, then," she said, "that must be the man who killed Joe. Joe came running out of the gulch, and the man shot him. Joe tried to defend himself, but was unable to do so. Isn't that it?"

"That's it," Tom agreed. "I'm sure of it."

"Then we must find that man."

"We will find him," Tom said. "I'll never rest till I find him."

"But only," she said, "that justice may be done."

"Only that," he nodded. "We will turn him over to the law."

She sat with her eyes on the floor for a long time, and he did not disturb her. At last she shook her head.

"That man must be a stranger hereabouts," she said. "I am sure I have even never seen him. If I had I would remember, because your description is so vivid."

There was a deep silence again for a while.

"Don't you think we had better send for the sheriff?" she asked.

"No," he said. "He will hear about it soon enough. He is a good man, and he will do what he can, but I'd rather get a start alone. I don't know what I'll do. Just hunt, I reckon. When do you want the funeral to be, Ruth?"

"To-morrow," she said. "It will be better."

"The man who was with Raymond said he would be back to-night," Tom said. "He can get word to the minister, can't he?"

"Yes."

"I'll see him."

"I wonder," she said presently, "how Joe knew about the gold in the gulch? He must have found out about it from Harry or from Herman. I don't think Harry told him, because Harry was too far gone to tell much of anything. Herman was as childish as he is now, as I remember him. There is something curious about it all. Why, Tom, do you suppose that the same man who killed Joe killed Harry? Did this gold hunt claim those two lives? You know what gold will do. You know what madness comes to men when the report of gold is spread."

"I know," Tom said soberly. "I have thought about Harry and Joe. I believe

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that if I can find the man who killed Harry, I will have the man that killed Joe. The mystery of those shootings is all one mystery, I'm sure."

"So now," she said, "you can do what you came here to do. I won't stop you any more. You have lost time serving me."

"I haven't done anything," he denied simply. "I couldn't do any less than lend you a hand when you needed it. You haven't got anybody but Eddie now, and he's just a boy. I want to stay here till this thing is all unraveled, if you will let me. Then I want to help you to do whatever you want to do. I told Logan your cattle would not be for sale. He will keep them till you are ready to take them back."

"I'll have to think what I am to do," she said. "It seems as if I were taking too much from you, Tom, but if you can stay for a little while till I—I——"

She shut her eyes against the crowding tears and he did not speak, did not stir. He knew that she would have these moments till her sorrow lost its first poignancy. Tears were better than a dry sorrow which could find no relief.

Before she recovered herself, there was a knock at the door. Tom thought it might be Eddie returning, and knocking so that his sister would know that he was there and have a chance to recover herself if she were suffering a brief recession from the stand which she had taken with him.

Ruth, though, her senses abnormally acute, seemed to know that it was not her brother. She rose swiftly.

"I don't want to see any one now," she said rather nervously. "Please see who it is."

She hastened through a door behind them and noiselessly mounted the stairs.

Tom walked to the door and opened it. Saulsbury stood below him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PATCH OF BLUE.

TOM expected to see in Saulsbury's face anything but what he actually saw there. He would not have been surprised if Saulsbury's face had gone mottled with anger at sight of himself, or if the writhing smile of scornful suspicion had come to Saulsbury's lips. But there was on the man's face only the blank look of incredulity.

"Can you step outside for a moment, Paige?" he asked.

Tom stepped down and closed the door behind him. Amazement was written large on his own face now. He might have suspected that Saulsbury was playing a part, but the man's expression was too genuine for that. No man, Tom was sure, could have summoned that expression to his face and have kept it there.

"What's this I hear about Joe Denny?" Saulsbury whispered.

"Who told you about it?" Tom asked, not because any suspicion was growing in him, but because from now on he must keep the record straight.

"There's no mystery about it," Saulsbury answered, and his tone was not impatient. "Nothing underground, Paige. Raymond rode over to my place and told me."

"He told you everything there was to tell, then, I reckon," Tom said. "Denny was murdered up in the gulch, while he was hunting for gold. I knew he was up there, had known it for some time. I went up to have a talk with him and found him shot to death. That's all there is to it."

Saulsbury was silent for a moment, crushing his hands together in front of him. "Who do you suspect, Paige?" he asked at last.

"I ain't suspectin' anybody," Tom answered.

"But haven't you a clew of any kind?"

Tom took his breath slowly while he

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regarded the man. Incredulity, he knew, might arise from one of several causes. Perhaps Saulsbury was incredulous merely because he believed that that guard would not have shot Denny. He might have known that the guard was up there. In that event he might have had something to do with the guard's having been placed there.

"Did you know that Denny was in the gulch?" Tom asked.

"Oh, I didn't, Paige," Saulsbury declared. "I knew Denny was away, but I thought he was on one of his usual disappearances. You know, he had a habit of going away, getting lit up, and staying away till he got straightened out. You got to give him credit for that much. He never came staggerin' home where his sister or young brother could see him."

"You and Denny had a quarrel, hadn't you?" Tom asked.

"Yes, we had a quarrel," Saulsbury answered. "That was why I had him bring that horse over here to gentle."

"I don't get that," Tom said.

"Well, I've been a fool," Saulsbury said. "I expect you think I've been a crook, too, but I haven't been—exactly. I'll tell you, Paige: I've spent most of my life on top of a horse. If I wanted to go a hundred feet, I'd hop a horse if there was one about. So I'm no boxer. You know how that is. Denny was never what I would call a horseman. That is, he could handle a horse, but he was at home on his feet. He'd mixed up with men that could box, and he had picked up the art.

"One night I was ridin' over here to see Ruth Denny. I overtook Denny on his way home. He had been on one of his tears, and he was ugly. He was one of the ugliest men I ever met when he was getting over one of them benders. When I drew up alongside him, he asked me where I was going. I said I was calling on his sister.

"He pulled his horse up against mine, grabbed me, and we went to the ground together. He was on his feet in that quick way he had, and when I started to get to my feet, he smashed me. That smash was enough to lick a man, but it made me mad, and I bored in on him the best I could. He laid me out.

"I'm no angel, Paige. I wanted to get even with him, but what could I do? I could have gone for him with a gun, but that would have meant my arrest when the facts came out. Denny rarely wore a gun. I reckon he was afraid to wear one for fear he'd get a shootin' craze some time when he wasn't himself. I could have set somebody else on him, but——"

"Larkin or the Mex or Peters, for instance," Tom suggested.

"I could have got one of them fellas, yes. But I couldn't stoop to that. Oh, I know that Mex is a bad actor, but he is one of the best men on a ranch that ever rode. That's why I been keepin' him, and as for Larkin, why, he has always been square enough with me. I know he sells whisky to anybody that comes to his place and peddles it in the village, but when you are home, Paige, I don't expect you pry into your neighbors' affairs. No man ever does, so long as his business don't conflict with your own.

"Well, it kind of seemed that fate was tryin' to play a trick. For a long time we had been gettin' reports that there was a wild horse in the hills. One or two fellas had got a glimpse of him, but they could never get near enough to him to get a rope on him. It'll show you that Jose ain't afraid of nothin' when I tell you that he had no sooner heard that report than he was crazy to go out and get that horse, and of course I let him go. If he was as bad as these fellas said he was, I knew I could get a good price for him from the round-up people. Well, in two days Jose came leadin' him in with a rope around his neck.

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"I guess the devil must have popped an evil notion into my head, for the minute I set eyes on that blue roan I said to myself that there was a horse that would lick Joe Denny. I knowed that Denny was hard up for money. He always was. He has been sellin' his stock till he hasn't hardly any left. So I sent the Mexican over here with the horse, with word for Denny that if Denny would gentle him I'd pay three hundred dollars."

"You expected that horse would kill Denny," said Tom.

"No, I didn't. You know yourself that it takes several thousand horses to produce one man-killer. You hear talks of man-killers, but you don't often see one. I thought this horse would give Denny a ride, and I also thought Denny couldn't do nothin' with him. He would be shook up some, and he would be hurt in his pride, for while he didn't live on a horse, he thought he could ride anything on four legs, and generally could. That's how come the horse was here when you showed up."

"It made you mad when I gentled that horse, eh?" Tom asked.

"It was the way you done it that made me mad," Saulsbury replied. "When a man pulls a trick like I was tryin' to pull, he has got a little sense of shame to fight, and it seemed to me that you was wise to my game, though of course you couldn't have been. If you had been gentlin' that horse for yourself, or—or for Miss Denny, you'd have played around with him till you won him over if he was ever to be won over, but since you was only goin' to deliver him to me, you treated him rough. You was just tryin' to bust him and arrangin' it so he could bust me later on or I could keep on bustin' him."

"He had been ridden and was ready to be ridden again when I got through with him," Tom said, grinning.

"Oh, I know the difference between bustin' a horse for another man and gentlin' him for your own use," Saulsbury said, and a rueful grin came to his lips.

Tom stood looking at the man for a moment. He saw that he had misjudged Saulsbury in a way. Probably Saulsbury was a fairly decent citizen, generally speaking. Something must have carried him off his feet. Tom could guess what that was. It was his feeling for Ruth Denny.

Tom, however, could not discuss that with him, and he had a notion that Saulsbury would not discuss it.

"Joe Denny's death has made you see things in a new light, has it?" Tom asked.

"It sure has," Saulsbury replied. "I may have been playin' a few tricks myself, but I ain't no murderer, and I don't countenance murder. I come over to see you to find out if there was any way I could help you to find out who killed Denny. That's on the square, Paige."

"There was another murder a while back," Tom said coldly. "A boy named Harry Comstock was murdered, up near where Denny was killed, too."

"Why, yes, I knew about that," Saulsbury said, "but that wasn't anything that interested me. The sheriff took up the case and couldn't find out anything."

"That boy was my brother," Tom said.

"Oh," said Saulsbury. "That's what brought you here, eh? Why didn't you tell me so when you came?"

"When you was hand in glove with Larkin and had that Mex workin' for you?" Tom scoffed. "And Raymond a friend of yours?"

"Appearances were against you, too," Saulsbury said. "Well, I'm here to help you find Joe's murderer if I can."

"Where's your Mex now?" Tom asked.

"Darned if I know. He rode off the night after we met you on the cattle drive, and I haven't seen him since."

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"Do you know that he tried to get me that night and that somebody stampeded the cattle?"

"No!" Saulsbury exclaimed, his eyes widening.

"You and Larkin went over to see the sheriff," Tom said.

"Only about Larkin's job," Saulsbury declared. "The sheriff had fired him."

Tom considered. He saw that he would have to regard Saulsbury in a new light. The man had been tricky and he was naturally inclined to be overbearing. He had been incensed by Tom's appearance at the Denny ranch and by Ruth's acceptance of him. But he was not a murderer.

"I'll describe a man to you," Tom said. "See if you know him."

He gave Saulsbury a minute description of the man who had been on guard. Saulsbury shook his head.

"Can't recall him at all," he said. "Who's he?"

"A fella I happened to meet up with. Do you know old Herman?

"Heard about him when that boy was shot. That's all."

"I saw Larkin up in Herman's cabin and afterward found the floor torn up. Something had been taken away. Who is this fella, Larkin, anyway? Where'd he come from and how long has he been here?"

"About five years. He worked for me once. Then he took on that piece of land he has and built himself a cabin. Land isn't any good. Sand and sage mostly. I knew what Larkin was doing, but is wasn't any of my business."

"Yet you let the sheriff appoint him deputy."

"What'd it amount to? The sheriff thought Larkin merely wanted the empty honor. Thought Larkin was vain. The sheriff was indebted to him and handed him what he could."

"Well, you're lined up on this side, then, are you?" Tom asked.

"I sure am."

"No matter if the game goes against your Mex and Larkin and that man Peters of yours?"

"Peters ain't with me no more," Saulsbury said. "He left yesterday mornin'."

"Where'd he go?"

"Don't know. Just said he was ridin'. He hadn't been with me more'n two months."

"Well, if you happen to run onto that fella I described, let me know," Tom said.

"I sure will. And, say, you just tell Miss Denny I'm mighty sorry about Joe, will you?"

"I'll do that."

"So long."

"So long."

Tom turned into the house with a feeling of relief. He was glad that Saulsbury was no worse than he now seemed to be. The man's forefathers had been here when cattle had been flung far and wide, before the days of fences. It would have been a shameful thing, Tom thought, if Saulsbury had been so untrue to that heritage as to have been mixed up with whoever had killed Harry and Joe. Love and jealousy had been Saulsbury's motive for what he had done. He had stooped to no crime, and when a crime had been committed, one which came home to him because of his interest in Ruth, he had been stopped short in his course. For the moment he had forgotten his jealousy.

Ruth came downstairs a few moments after Tom reëntered the kitchen.

"Who was it?" she asked.

"Saulsbury. He said to tell you he was sorry."

"Saulsbury isn't a bad man, Tom," she said. "Only a little foolish."

"I know," he said.

He looked at her and saw that her face was tired, and her eyes red. She had been crying.

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"Now, ma'am," Tom said, "I wish you would go and get some rest. I will stay down here and—and watch."

"You must be tired yourself. You didn't sleep much last night."

"I ain't tired, ma'am, not the least. Where's Eddie?"

"I got him to lie down. He was worn out. Herman is sleeping, too. He doesn't do much but sleep."

"Well, you go and rest, ma'am," he said.

She stood uncertainly for a moment, and then she nodded and went upstairs.

She must have slept, and old Herman and Eddie apparently did not waken, for as the evening shadows came down there was no sound in the house. Tom made coffee, drank it, and ate a little. He lighted a cigarette and let his head fall to his chest. He almost dozed but not so much so that he did not pull at the cigarette now and then.

In one of the deepening instants of this doze he suddenly came up with lifted head. There had been a shuffling noise on the stairs. He knew that it was neither Eddie nor Ruth. They would not descend in what seemed to be a careless fashion. They would come softly and on tiptoe.

Tom could not believe that there was an intruder in the house at this time, but one could never tell what a man like Larkin or that Mexican or even that armed guard would do. So he rose soundlessly, went to the door, and stood beside it, his hand on his gun. He would shove a gun up against the intruder if such he proved to be and insure his making no noise.

There was a groping beyond the door, and Tom knew that a hand was seeking the latch. The sound ceased, and the latch was loosened and the door swung open. Herman came into the room. Tom had forgotten about him.

Tom moved out from the wall and the old prospector came on into the room. Tom saw that his eyes were clearer than they had been; that far-away look had gone out of them. Yet there was a puzzled frown between his eyes. He stood looking at Tom without the slightest recognition showing in his face.

"Well, how're you feelin' by now, old-timer?" Tom asked in a low voice.

Herman did not at once reply. His eyes traveled the room, and when he returned them to Tom's face, the look of uncertainty had grown.

"What place is this?' he asked.

"Denny's ranch house."

Herman rubbed his forehead and pushed his gnarled fingers up through his hair. He shook his head from side to side and then he went over to the chair Tom had lately quitted and sank into it.

"Denny's?" he said. "Oh, I brought that young feller down here, didn't I? He was shot. Less see. What was his name, now?"

"Harry Comstock."

"Oh, yeah. I rec'lect. He died, didn't he?"

"Yes, he died."

"When are they goin' to bury him?"

Tom saw that the old fellow was back to the night of his arrival in this house on the previous occasion. His mind, as it was now functioning, did not span that interval. Tom wondered whether he remembered anything that had happened. As he had suspected, Herman's brain was a dazed and weakened thing.

"How long since you've eaten?" Tom asked. "Hungry?"

"When I woke up I thought I was in my own cabin," Herman said. "I went feelin' around, and I might' nigh tumbled down them stairs. Tumbles is bad things at my age."

He looked at the table where Tom's coffee cup and plate still were. "I feel kinda gone," he said. "Ain't I been eatin' reg'lar? I always been a pretty good eater."

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"I'll make some coffee for you and get you some food," Tom said very quietly.

While Tom prepared the food and coffee, Herman's gaze wandered to the door behind which Joe Denny lay.

"Harry in there yet?" he asked.

"No," Tom answered gently. "Harry is up in the cemetery. He was killed quite a long time ago."

"That so?" Herman asked, rubbing his stubbly chin. "I seem to be kinda confused. Thought I'd come here just to-night, packin' Harry."

"Take your time," Tom said.

Herman sat in vacancy till the meal was ready. Then he ate rapidly, hungrily.

"Did you know Joe Denny?" Tom asked, as he finished.

Herman lifted his head. There was something definite in his manner now. Tom saw that he was as sane as he would ever be, and this was the time to get from him whatever coherent story he would tell. Tom thought Herman's mind had for the moment settled into something like order. It made Tom think of a sky which had been covered over with tumbled clouds, and in which a patch of blue had suddenly showed.

"Herman," he said gravely, "what is this story about gold up in your gulch?"

"My gulch?" said Herman. "Ain't got no gulch."

"You knew where there was a gulch with a vein of gold in it," Tom suggested.

The old prospector uttered a low cackle of scorn.

"Gold in this country?" he asked. "Why, there ain't no gold here. Vein? Pah! You can't even wash out no gold. I have rocked a pan till my old hands ached and never found nothin' in the bottom of it. Gold here? You might as well try to find gold in the ashes of that stove. Whatever put that idea into yer head, stranger?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

HERMAN'S EL DORADO.

TOM had had that suspicion lately, and he felt no surprise now at Herman's disclosure. Yet it left him aghast. The lure of gold had bred hatreds, and these had resulted in the deaths of two men. In this way the gold was as real as if it lay in a thick vein up in those hills.

He could not, however, let Herman see that he was moved. He did not understand the old prospector's mental condition very well. He simply thought he was a "little off." He had a notion, though, that he must proceed gently with him. He did not know just how much would be necessary to shake Herman from the firm ground which he had temporarily come to. If he made a mistake, Herman might become dazed again and begin to babble.

"I expect you have hunted for gold a lot, Herman," he said quietly. "In California, for instance."

Herman looked at him queerly. His eyes brightened and as quickly grew dull. Again he drew his tremulous hand over his chin.

"This ain't Californy, then?" he asked uncertainly.

"No; this ain't California."

"That's right," Herman said, and he was suddenly bright again. "I rec'lect now. I was in Californy, and I decided to move. Seems like I traveled a long ways. Parts of the trip fade out, but I went over desert and through hills and mountains and then I found myself in a cabin by a stream. No; lemme see. Not by a stream. That was some place else. Oh, yes, that cabin up yonder. I 'member now. I started to wash gold there. Why, hang it, no. I didn't wash no gold there. There wasn't no stream. Lemme see. Lemme see."

"You brought some dust with you," Tom suggested.

"Oh, yeah. Some dust I had been

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hoardin' for a long time, savin' a little every year, against the time when I couldn't rock a pan no more." He grew excited. "Stranger, I got a poke of dust up there in that cabin, under the floor. I must go get it."

He got to his feet, trembling, but Tom put a hand on his arm and forced him back.

"You can't go up there now, Herman," he said gently. "Your gold will probably be all right."

"Prob'ly," the old man agreed, with one of the swift changes of old age. "I got her hidden. You betcha!"

His head went to his chest and Tom felt him drifting away to one of those remote places where he had pursued his vain hunt. Tom could not let him go. He might not come back.

"What was your idea in leavin' California, Herman?" Tom asked.

"Why, there was a gulch with a vein of gold in it," Herman answered. "I could see it plain as day. And I just come along to find it. Y'know how it is, stranger? A man that has hunted gold all his life has got to get up and foller when he gets to feelin' that a way. He shore has."

"When Harry came, you told him about the gulch because you weren't able to go up there yourself?" Tom asked.

"You betcha I did. I said to him we would share and share alike. He was a bright young feller. He was all enthoosiasm soon as I told him. He went right up to the gulch next mornin'. But —But—oh—yes, he was comin' home that evenin' when he was shot. Yeah, I was standin' in the door of the cabin watchin' him come along when he fell down on his face and I looked up and saw a puff of smoke hangin' in the air. Don't rec'lect now if I heard no shot. Guess not. An' I got Harry and packed him down here to this house."

"This house," Tom answered. "And you didn't see the man that shot Harry?"

"If I had seen him," Herman said seriously, "I would have killed him. I thought a lot of Harry."

"Then after you went back to the cabin, who did you send up into the gulch?" Tom asked.

Herman wrinkled his brows and had recourse to rubbing his chin again. "Who was that feller that come up to my cabin next day?" he asked.

"Joe Denny, prob'ly," Tom answered, and he described Joe as minutely as he could.

"Yes, yes," said Herman, excited, as his memory burned strongly for a moment like a flame that flares up. "That was the feller that talked to me here at this house that night. He asked me a lot of questions. Wanted to know wasn't I a prospector, and hadn't I found gold, and wasn't Harry killed in a fight over gold. As if I'd tell him about that vein!"

"You are sure you didn't tell him?" Tom asked.

"Well, y'see," said Herman apologetically, "he come up there and he set and talked to me for a long time, and it was kind of good, me bein' lonesome about Harry; and I up and told him, for he said we would go fifty-fifty on it. That was just like what Harry an' me had been goin' to do, and of course Harry was gone. So this man went up into the gulch. I expect he will be down to see me before long to make a settlement with me. The gold is shorely up there, this side of the waterfall, or t'other side, I dunno which. But the gold is there."

"You said a while ago that there was no gold in this country, Herman," Tom said severely.

"There hain't neither," Herman declared. "There is gold in Californy, though. The big strike was in Californy a while back, y'know. But that feller ain't goin' to find no gold up in that gulch, an' that is a fact. No, there ain't no gold in this country."

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"Yet you sent both him and Harry up there to look for gold," Tom declared.

"Oh, stranger, you are gettin' things all mixed up," Herman complained. "This gold I am speakin' of was way back yonder some place. I don't know a lot, but I know there is no gold hereabouts. You tell all them men that, when you see them. Why, there must be a hundred men up in that gulch. It's a reg'lar stampede. Nights men would go streamin' by my cabin door, all on their way up into that gulch. I would set an' count 'em. Sometimes when I got things fixed plain in my head I would call to 'em an' tell 'em they was chasin' fools' gold. But they wouldn't pay no attention to me. They would just go streamin' by. After a while I didn't care. They looked kind of nice in their uniforms an' with the band playin' an' everything."

"Do you know a man named Larkin?" Tom asked after a moment.

"Never heard of no sech person," Herman declared. "I been in this country for forty year, but never met a man by any sech name as that."

Patiently Tom described Larkin and the Mexican, Saulsbury and Peters, and the man who had been on guard at the mouth of the gulch, but Herman only shook his head and denied any knowledge of any "sech" men.

"You'd better go back to bed now and get some more rest, Herman," Tom said.

Herman rose obediently, like a child, but he stood looking around the room with an expression of dull surprise on his face.

"My bunk," he said.

"Your bed is upstairs," Tom said gently.

"I was thinkin' I was in my cabin," the old man said. "I'm kinda confused most of the time, stranger. Things is all of a jumble. I'm right glad to have met you, anyhow. I will tell you more about that gold when I get a little sleep. We will shore go fifty-fifty on it."

"All right, Herman."

He helped the old man to the room upstairs, keeping him as quiet as possible. However, when he returned to the kitchen, he heard a light footfall on the stairs, and Ruth came down very quietly.

"Herman and you were talking, weren't you?" she asked. "I couldn't help but hear your voices."

"Yes," he said, and he told her what he had learned from the prospector.

"There is no gold then," she said, "and never has been any. Joe must have been convinced that Herman had made a strike, and Joe could think of nothing but getting some of that gold. He was always like that, always ready to pursue some will-o'-the-wisp. That was why he wanted to sell everything here. He didn't know what he was going to do exactly, but he wanted to make a fresh start."

"Well, the way seems pretty clear to me now," Tom said. "All I've got to do is to find that sack of dust that Herman was robbed of and that man that was on guard at the mouth of the gulch By to-morrow noon I'll be on my way, and there won't be no quittin' then till the thing is cleaned up."

"You ought to rest now and start as soon as you can," Ruth said. "I have hindered you long enough."

"You haven't hindered me none at all, ma'am," Tom assured her. "I would just have blundered around till I found something. And I have found a good deal now. I ain't no detective, you know. I just had to keep lookin' till I got hold of something. It will be easy from now on."

"That guard has probably fled," she said. "He is doubtless far away from here by now."

"Well," said Tom simply, "he won't go east of the Mississippi River, 'tain't likely. He will be some place between

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Canada and the Mexican line. 'Tain't likely he will go down into Mexico. If he is any place in this here Western playground, I will get him."

She looked at him. He was not boasting. He was a man capable of a dogged pursuit like that. He was the kind of man who does not know when to quit.

"It may take you a long time," she said.

"Yes, ma'am, it may, but I arranged my affairs before I left home. I have got a good foreman on my ranch, and I don't have nothin' but top riders. Everything will run slick over there till I get back, if it is five years from now."

"I am not revengeful," she said, "but it seems that Joe's murderer and Harry's ought to pay for what they did."

"Oh, yes, ma'am," he said, "they will pay. We will get them now. We will bring them into a court of justice, and the law will take care of them."

"Of course," she said, "there is always the danger that there will be gun play when you finally find them. They know by now that you are hunting them. They have you at a disadvantage. They know who you are and you don't know for sure who they are. You just suspect that man you saw at the gulch."

"Why, yes," he agreed, "that is true. But we got to take our chance on that. I—you would expect me to protect myself, wouldn't you, ma'am?"

"Of course!"

"Well, ma'am, none of them fellas is as fast with a gun as I am. I always like a gun for some reason or other—that is, a six-gun. I ain't never been no hunter. I ain't of the killin' kind. But I have always liked to see where I could place a bullet. I been well fixed enough of late years to afford a good deal of practice. So I kept it up. I expect I wasted more cartridges than a man drawin' his forty a month could afford—more than this Mex or Larkin or that guard could afford, I reckon. It was the only dissipation I had. Of course a man can practice drawin' an' all that, but there ain't nothing' so good for the eye and the hand as poppin' bullets.

"Now, ma'am, one-two things comes up. This here Larkin is goin' to accuse me of killin' your brother. I expect that Raymond will back him up in that, for if I'm not mistaken, that medical man is in on this thing. I didn't like him first night I laid eyes on him, and I wasn't none too civil. I can't help that streak in me. I either like a person or I don't, and I always play them hunches."

"I've noticed that," she said, and he thought she would have smiled if she had not been weighted with her burden of sorrow.

"Well, a while back," he said, "this here Larkin mentioned that I was ridin' with a mask on my face. He knowed I was up in the vicinity of that gulch. The sand was blowin' some, and he could easy guess that when I left him I would draw my handkerchief up over my nose and mouth. I reckon you, yourself, have seen a hundred or so ridin' men do that, ma'am."

"I have done it myself," she said. "I was doing it the first time I met you, till my horse went down."

"Exactly. Well, I think Larkin is goin' to grab at that straw. Then it was me that found your brother, ma'am, and it may be that I will have a tall time explainin' why I went up to that gulch at that particular time. I ain't got no very good explanation for it. I just was lookin' around. I was on the prowl, and that's all there was to it. But that may not look so good.

"So you see, ma'am, I may be frontin' the law as well as these fellas we have spoke of. In case things get lined up that way, ma'am, I will have to do

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whatever I think best. If the sheriff takes it into his head to arrest me, I will have to see that he don't and that may be a handicap in a way."

"Oh, but the sheriff won't arrest you," she said.

"You never can tell," she said. "That sheriff is an old man. I reckon he lived in this country when a sheriff was judge and jury and the whole thing. In my lifetime even I have seen old sheriffs take the law into their hands and render decisions just like they was the whole works of justice. How long has this man been sheriff?"

"As long as I can remember," she said.

"Sure. That's what I expected. And he is just the kind to make up his mind all by his lonesome, and he might make it up against me."

"Is there no way to anticipate that—to prevent it?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, there ain't. I just got to wait till the sheriff makes a move. Then I will have to do what I think is best." He stopped and looked at her from between narrowed eyes. She returned his gaze steadily.

"I reckon, ma'am," he said, "that you know why I am goin' over the ground with you in this manner."

"I she said, "and don't think that I sha ever be swayed by suspicion, no matter what happens, I know you did not kill my brother. I know you came here on an honest errand. I will believe in you to the end."

"That," said Tom Paige, with a slow exhalation of the breath he had been holding, "is what I was drivin' at. I knowed what your answer would be. Now, ma'am, to-morrow noon I will leave here. I will be rangin' this country for some time to come. If the sheriff is after me, I will not show up here. If he ain't, if I just have to play the game straight across the table, I will stop in now and then to see how you are getting along."

Ruth lifted her head proudly. "Whenever you can come here without danger to yourself, be sure to come," she said. "If you need food, or if Eddie and I can help you in any way, come to us."

"Yes, ma'am, I know how you are," said Tom, "but if the breaks go against me, I will have to ride alone. I only ask you, ma'am, not to let anybody make you change your mind till you see me."

"I shan't change my mind," she declared.

The proud look in her eyes sent an invisible shiver through his body, but he forced himself to keep looking at her calmly.

"Now, ma'am, you get some more rest," he said. "I got a lot of thinkin' to do. I will get some sleep in the mornin'. I ain't tired, none at all."

"All right, Tom," she said softly.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT BAY.

TOM was asleep in the bunk house at high noon the next day. He had been asleep for an hour and a half, and he lay like a man who had been drugged. All the night before he had insisted upon remaining up while Ruth and Eddie rested. Herman had not stirred apparently till Eddie had taken his breakfast up to him.

Raymond and the undertaker had returned the night before and the coffin had been brought over from the county seat. That morning, early, Joe Denny had been buried. He had been buried beside Harry, up in the hillside cemetery, and Tom had looked down for the first time on the grave of his brother. He and Ruth had stood beside each other and they had seemed to have a community of sorrow.

Of the men whom Tom was to seek, none had been there. Saulsbury was there, and he had displayed a silent deference toward Ruth.

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"I shouldn't like to have you hunt Saulsbury," Ruth had said afterward, "though I wouldn't attempt to stop you if it were necessary. But he is more like one of ourselves, you know. He has made mistakes, but any man might do that."

"Yes," Tom had assented.

He had had to fight to keep awake as soon as he had put Silver away, and Ruth had insisted, as he had insisted about her before, that he rest. She seemed to have gathered strength, now that her ordeal was past, and so he had dragged himself to the bunk house and cast himself down on the first bunk he came to. He had plunged into sleep at once.

He had, however, gone to sleep with the possibility in the back of his mind that the sheriff would arrive soon. That official, he believed, had held off merely because of a delicacy of feeling toward Ruth. Now he would have to do his duty as he saw it. Tom did not, of course, know what the sheriff would consider his duty, but he knew that the sheriff would at least want to question him about the finding of Joe's body.

Therefore, though his sleep was deep and heavy, Tom was awakened by the first quick rapping on the bunk-house door. He sat up, slid to the edge of the bunk, shook his head, rubbed his eyes, and got to his feet.

The opened door disclosed the sheriff just beyond it, with Larkin and Peters beyond him.

"Want to see me, sheriff?" Tom asked.

"Like to," the sheriff answered. "Just want to talk to you a minute."

"Wait till I get my boots on."

The sheriff nodded and stepped back. Tom returned into the bunk house without closing the door. He had taken off only his coat and his boots when he had lain down, so that dressing took but a moment. He pulled on the boots with their thin soles and tight insteps, but he did not don the coat. He held it over his arm. When he stepped out to face the sheriff, a gun sagged on each hip.

When he had first come to the door, he had glanced swiftly over the three men, and he had seen that they were all armed. Peters and the sheriff had but one gun each; Larkin had two.

"You're ready to answer a few questions, Paige?" the sheriff asked very abruptly.

"S'pose we go out beyond the corral, sheriff," Tom said, with a glance toward the house.

The sheriff nodded and turned away. Tom followed him, and the two other men fell in behind. As Tom passed the corral he glanced at Silver. Before he had lain down, he had fed and watered Silver and had let him roll. Then Tom had put his gear on him again. He was now tied in one corner of the corral, ready to be mounted. The sheriff noticed this.

"You was figurin' on ridin' right away, was you?" he asked.

"I was figurin' on ridin' when I got around to it," Tom answered coolly.

"Uh-huh."

Beyond the corral the sheriff stopped and faced Tom. The two other men stood behind.

"You are the sheriff," Tom said. "Who are these two other fellas? Are they deputies of yours?"

"No," the sheriff answered, "but they got a little information about the matter in hand. I may want to ask them a question or two as we go along."

"S'posin' they take front seats," Tom suggested. "I figure they are lined up against me in this matter, and it wouldn't provoke me none if I could see the whites of their eyes as they give their answers to them questions."

"Step up, boys," the sheriff said. "The request ain't onreasonable."

Larkin and Peters came around in front. Tom backed to the corral and

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stood there, but he did not lean against it. His arms were free.

"Sheriff," he said briskly, "let's get a few things cleared away here before we begin. Would you just as leave ask them two hombres to step back while you and me passes a word or two."

"Don't you do it, sheriff," Larkin broke in. "I told you he was full o' tricks and fast as——"

"Never mind what you told me," the sheriff retorted. "I am handlin' this matter. I didn't bring you here to take no advice from you. I brought you here because you said you knowed somethin'. It's come to me lately, Larkin, that you been puttin' a few things over on me. I ain't takin' to that none too kindly. You worked on my sympathies and my generosity. You kinda step back out of earshot."

Larkin, grumbling, stepped back, and Peters followed him.

"When I first come up here, sheriff, who was the man I went to?" Tom asked.

"Why, me," the sheriff answered. "You come to me and told me your story—how you was goin' to try to find the man that killed your brother, and I told you to hop to it. I was the man, wasn't I, that got word to you in the first place? Your brother whispered your name and address to me as he lay dyin', bréathin' his last almost, and I respected his confidence, didn't I?"

"You sure did," Tom agreed. "Well, did you wire back to the sheriff of my county to find out if I was tellin' you what was straight?"

"Why, I didn't," the sheriff answered. "You looked all right to me. I can size up a man for myself. I took your word for what you told me."

"I expected you would," Tom said. "I knowed you was that kind of a judge-and-jury sheriff."

"You tryin' to insinuate somethin'?"

"I am not. If you want to know, you are my kind of sheriff. Now then, has somethin' happened that has changed your opinion of me?"

"No, sir. I am just lookin' into the matter of the shootin' of Joe Denny. Larkin has told me a few things, and I want to ask you about them."

"That's all I wanted to know," Tom answered, smiling. "Let Larkin and his side kicker step up."

Larkin and Peters came in answer to the sheriff's summons. Larkin started to edge over to one side of Tom.

"Would you mind tellin' this fella to stand out in front, sheriff?" Tom asked. "I ain't trustin' him none."

"Nobody's askin' you to trust me," Larkin spat out.

"I waited till you got up here before I spoke my piece," Tom mildly reminded him.

"Never mind about that, now," the sheriff broke in testily. "You go on and speak your piece, Larkin."

"And while you're speakin' it, Larkin," Tom added softly, "you can keep your hands where they belong."

"You are squeezin' your own sides with your hands," Larkin snarled out.

"Just restin' them," Tom said. "You can do that, but don't let 'em go slidin' toward them guns of yours."

"I don't ask you where I can keep my hands."

"No, but I'm tellin' you."

"Go on, Larkin," the sheriff snapped out.

"I was up yonder when the sand was blowin' the other day——" Larkin began, "and——"

"Up in old Herman's cabin," Tom supplied.

"And this fella come up there," Lark proceeded. "Me and him had a little run-in. I drove him off. He thought I wouldn't have the nerve to follow him, but I done it. He doubled back and come out beyond where we had been. He had a mask over his face."

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"Now, just a minute," Tom interposed. "You are a liar a couple of ways. You didn't follow me. You wouldn't have had the nerve. You know I wasn't wearin' no mask. You just guessed I would pull my handkerchief over my face to keep the sand out of my nose and mouth. How many times have you seen a man do that, sheriff?"

"Many," the sheriff answered briefly.

"I'm chargin' you was masked and was on the prowl," Larkin declared.

"All right. Where did I go?"

"You come around and climbed the hill and went by the sink till you was above Joe Denny, where he was workin' in the gulch."

"That's right, and then what did I do?"

"You didn't do nothin'. You just stayed there and got an eyeful."

"You didn't see me go down and talk to Denny, did you?"

"You didn't talk to Denny."

Tom cast down his eyes. It was important that he find out whether Larkin knew that man who had been on guard at the mouth of the gulch, and still he could not permit Larkin to learn that he knew about that man. It might just be that Larkin was fishing to discover what he did know.

"Larkin," he said, suddenly looking up, "you didn't follow me that day. I tell you, you wouldn't have had the nerve. Your description of what I did is fairly correct, but I think you had some one else following me. I didn't see any one else—didn't see any one but Denny. Who did you set on my trail, Larkin?"

He had got, he saw, what he wanted. Larkin did not deny that he had any one on Tom't trail. He did not seem to think that was worth denial. But Tom caught the sudden glow in his eyes, a glow of relief. So Larkin had known about the guard, and he was highly pleased because he thought that Tom had been unaware of the guard's presence.

Tom felt that he had taken a long step. The guard had undoubtedly killed Joe Denny. Larkin had known that the guard was at the gulch. Therefore Larkin must know that the guard had been the slayer.

"Whyn't you answer him, Larkin?" the sheriff broke in.

"Answer him? Answer him what?"

"Did you set anybody on his trail."

"I didn't. He is four-flushin'. I have described what he done that day, and he don't deny it. He was on the prowl with a mask on his face, I'm tellin' you."

"He might have had his handkerchief pulled over his nose and mouth to keep out the dust," the sheriff said. "Anyways, he didn't commit no crime up there. Now, let's get down to the killin. What do you know about that, Larkin?"

"This here fella an' Ruth Denny drove some cattle over to Logan's," Larkin said. "I was over that way, and——"

"You had the Mexican with you, didn't you?" Tom asked.

"I didn't. I ain't seen that Mexican for some time. I was over there by myself. I——"

"Gettin' some liquor, was you?"

"I wasn't gettin' no liquor. I——"

Tom's purpose was to make Larkin lose his temper while Tom kept his own. He saw that the man had concocted a lie and was about to tell it. It was a lie which might be very damaging to himself. He might have some one else to lie with him—Peters possibly.

Tom, as he had told Ruth, had come here to see that the law was served, but he was not thinking of the law now. That deadly anger which will come to a patient man was beginning to swell in his veins. Larkin, he told himself, had better go easy. But he fought that back. He must keep his temper. Yes.

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he must keep it and make Larkin lose his own.

"You were there to stampede those cattle, then," Tom quickly interrupted him.

"You—I wasn't. I don't know nothing about no cattle bein' stampeded. I was comin' home and I seen a man ridin' down the road. I couldn't make nothin' out of him, but I reco'nized the horse. It was that buckskin that this guy rides, sheriff—that buckskin right in the corral yonder.

"I follered the horse, and the horse led me over to the gulch. This here guy dismounted and crept up the mouth of the gulch. I crept in behind him. He went in about fifty feet mebbe, and then he stopped and he fired three shots."

"Such as the Mexican fired to get me to where he could plug me," Tom offered.

"Don't know what you're talkin' about," Larkin said.

Excitement was growing in the man, Tom saw. Before he went on, he slavered and caught at the saliva with his tongue.

"Joe Denny must have been woke up out of his sleep by them shots," he proceeded. "In a minute I seen him come runnin' down toward this fella. This fella had his gun in his hand, and——"

"That's enough!"

Tom hardly recognized his own voice, so thick was it with fury. He had not succeeded in angering Larkin beyond control. The man had been too intent on voicing his accusation. Tom knew what Larkin had been going to say—he had been going to say that Tom had shot and killed Denny. But Tom had made up his mind that Larkin should not speak the accusing words. It was not that he did not want to hear them uttered; it was only that he would not give Larkin the satisfaction of uttering them.

"I'm goin'——" Larkin began.

"You're not goin' to say that," Tom declared.

"I don't see no harm in him completin' his story," the sheriff said. "If you can prove he's lyin', all well an' good. Words won't kill you."

"Words have killed men before this," Tom declared. "I was alone up in that gulch. If Larkin says what he intends to say, how can I disprove it?"

"You can't," Larkin cried, his voice shrilling and then breaking. "I got backin' for what I say. Peters was there too. I picked him up on the way. Him an' me——"

"You both lie," Tom said, and now his voice was clear and cold. His eyes swept the two men in front of him. He knew that his first danger would come from them. The sheriff would be slower, he was older, and he probably would not be expecting gun play.

Tom's first intimation of danger came from the silent Peters, as he had expected it would come. He saw that Peters was almost fully convinced that he should draw his gun.

From that Tom gathered that Peters was a hired man. It was something to remember. He was a hired man, and he was not especially brilliant in his rôle. He made a vital mistake. As his hand moved almost imperceptibly, his eyes drifted to Larkin to see what Larkin was going to do.

Tom's two guns came out. They traveled the three men.

"Hands up, you two coyotes," he said. "Sorry to have to include you, too, sheriff. Up with 'em—in a hurry."

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

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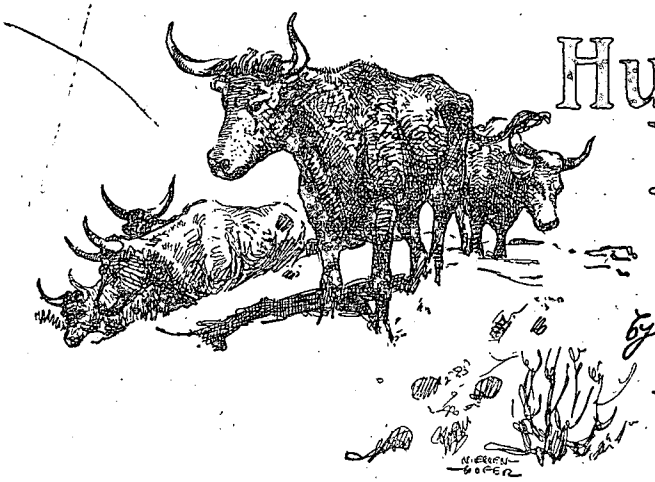

Humane Mister Shorty

by Ray Humphreys

Author of "All His Fun for Nuthin'," etc.

TWO things troubled Sheriff Joe Cook of Monte Vista as he came plodding back from the post office.

One thing that worried him was the weather report, for the week, which the postmaster had just received. It said snow—a lot of it, possibly a big blizzard—for the Monte Vista territory, and that meant that old Jim Craig would surely lose another good bunch of cattle.

And the second thing that troubled the sheriff was his deputy, "Shorty" McKay, who, as usual, was fooling away his time and energies in pursuits far from profitable to the sheriff.

"See here, Shorty," said Sheriff Cook, striding in to the sheriff's office and finding his deputy there, "I hears from Postmaster Blum that yuh has got a brand new badge?"

Shorty reddened and gulped. "Yes, boss!"

"Perduce it!"

Shorty reached into his vest pocket with two fingers and extracted a silver badge, which he tossed uneasily to the sheriff, who held it up close to scrutinize it.

"Purty, ain't it?" said Sheriff Cook sneeringly, glancing from the badge to Shorty, who was coloring again. Shorty nodded; he had hoped the sheriff wouldn't get wise to that badge, and for that reason he had carefully and with great will power refrained from wearing it, but now old Blum had gone and spilled the beans.

"Colorado Hoo-mane Sassiety!" exclaimed the sheriff, twisting the badge this way and that so as to read the minutely inscribed lettering. "Volunteer officer number—number 702! Waal, waal, waal—now ain't that real nice?"

There was withering sarcasm in the question, and Shorty wilted, as might have been expected.

"Reckoned," he said mildly, "that mebbe that badge an' authority might come in handy—dogged ef I don't hate to see a man abusin' his hoss, or kickin' a dawg around, or neglectin' to feed his cattle, or—or——"

Sheriff Cook eyed Shorty with disgust. "An' ain't that badge I guv yuh to wear good enough to maintain all the law an' order between here an' Pagosa Springs without yuh goin' out an' procurin' another piece o' tin?"

Again Shorty nodded, speechless.

"But mebbe," said the sheriff, and his ruddy old face brightened up with camouflaged hope, "mebbe yuh was thinkin' o' ol' Jim Craig's cattle when yuh applied fer this purty new badge? Mebbe

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yuh was figgerin' on stoppin' that cruelty —them steers an' calves disappearin' Lord knows whar every time they is a blizzard?"

"Yes, sir," said Shorty.

The disappearance, regularly, every time there was a big snow, of a bunch of Craig's cattle from the High Mesa, was the standing mystery of the San Luis Valley, and it irked the sheriff as well as Craig, who was a pioneer in the valley. Craig's ranch lay in Creek Bend Hollow, nestling in a little valley that marked the headwaters of Cub Creek, where it was safe from the rigors of the long winter that howled around the upper peaks.

Craig's cattle, however, grazed, both summer and winter, on the High Mesa, which Craig had owned for more than twenty years. Two trails led to the mesa, one, an old mining trail, hugged the sheltered side of the tumbled mountain slopes and led from the High Mesa down to the isolated and desolate ranch of José Valentia, on the far side of the range from Craig's place. The other trail, leading up from Craig's rancho to the High Mesa, wound over the high, wind-swept places, and was impassable in the big storms.

It was always, it seemed, during one of the blizzards that blocked the Craig Trail, that Craig's cattle disappeared, and the general belief was, since old José Valentia had no cattle and could not have concealed stolen cattle anyway, that Craig's "critters" were swept before the storm and driven over some of the innumerable high cliffs, to perish in one of the hundreds of deep cañons that circled the High Mesa. This was the belief, and yet nobody knew.

Twice already this winter, Craig had suffered losses, and they were exceptionally big losses, and now he dreaded the approach of another blizzard. Further, he was becoming skeptical and peevish. He and his riders had explored a great many of the cañons, seeking the telltale pile of broken and twisted bodies that might show where a storm-driven bunch of animals had plunged over the rim, but they had found nothing to indicate that the cattle had gone over. Further, they had visited old José's ranch and put a rope around his neck and threatened him, but he had sworn that he knew nothing of the disappearing animals.

The old mining trail, which led from his place up to the mesa, was a mere tortuous scratch on the mountainsides, and, undoubtedly, as impassable in a storm as the main trail from the Craig ranch, so that was that, and Craig had finally come blustering into town to demand that Sheriff Cook get far enough away from the heat of his office stove to solve the mystery of the lost cattle, for Craig meant to know where his stuff went, and, he hinted, it would be politically wise for the sheriff to get busy and solve the mystery that had now run along for three years.

No wonder, then, that Sheriff Cook took the forecast of another blizzard with a sinking heart. He had thought of sticking through the next blizzard on the High Mesa and trying to solve the problem there, but the uncertainty of how long he would be snowed in there, and whether or not he could cope with the situation if he did chance upon the solution, deterred him. It was impossible to get a posse to consent to weather a blizzard on the mesa, and the sheriff himself had other duties that demanded his attention in Monte Vista. The idea of putting Shorty on guard on the mesa had occurred to him, but Shorty did not seem to relish such a prospect. Now, however, with another blizzard due in a day or two, the sheriff decided on drastic measures. The morning after he had read the forecast at the post office, he collected half a dozen men.

"When I want that fool deputy of mine, Shorty," he complained, "I kain't

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find him. I meant to have him go out with us this mawnin'——"

"He rode out early, sheriff," spoke up Bud Stewart. "I seen him go; he's been gettin' out early an' in late fer nigh a week; I think he's up around the High Mesa."

"Naw, he ain't," said Sheriff Cook sourly. "He wouldn't be foolin' around so close to a place I'd really like to have him; that's where we are headin' fer, men. Thar's another blizzard comin'—an', waal, Craig stands to lose some more cattle. We're goin' to look that place over before the storm. Bud, yuh take three men an' search them cañons ag'in an' see ef yuh find any daid critters. I don't think yuh will; me, I'll take four men an' make the mesa an' ride it to see ef thar ain't another trail down from it where them cattle might git down into the bad lands to the west. Thar must be a third trail off that mesa of Craig's, and Valentia's are snow-bound; howsomever, the cattle disappear anyhow!"

So the quickly formed posse parted. Bud led his men up Cub Creek past the Craig rancho and then started out around the base of the mesa, poking into this cañon and that, and looking in vain for the heap of bodies that would solve the disappearances. Sheriff Cook, stopping at the Craig place, picked up Craig and two of his riders, and explained that he meant to make another and thorough survey of the High Mesa in the belief that there was a hidden trail down, somewhere, which might explain how the cattle vanished. They either fled down the trail to the bad lands, whipped by the blizzard, or they were driven down by those who took advantage of the storm.

"Glad to see yuh gittin' busy at last," said Craig sarcastically, as the sheriff explained his mission. "But yuhr deputy—the new hoo-mane officer—has beat yuh to it, sheriff. He's been up on the mesa for several days, an' plague him he's got two o' my men with him an' I ain't been able to git a line on what they're up to, neither; they took three pack horses, too!"

Sheriff Cook's face beamed, genuinely this time. "Mebbe Shorty has took the bull by the horn an' figgers on weatherin' the next storm up thar like a man!" exclaimed the sheriff. "But that's just mebbe——"

"Mebbe is right," said Craig. "He ain't figgerin' on no sech thing; tol' me he was plannin' to git about half o' his task finished afore the storm, an' might stay here at my place when she did hit; said he was workin' more as a hoo-mane officer than as a deputy, anyhow, on this particular job."

"What?"

That spoiled the whole day for the sheriff. His hopes, raised by the news that Shorty was on the mesa, had tumbled with the rancher's further explanations. What a fool he was to think Shorty was really planning anything useful. Acting more as a humane officer, eh? Well, that could mean but one thing: Shorty was not much interested in the disappearance of the Craig cattle. Likely he was building winter structures for the critters on the mesa so that they could stick out the storms in more comfort!

"Hoo-mane officer!" blurted out the sheriff in chagrin. "I'll hoo-mane him ef I catches sight o' him, yuh bet."

And, a few hours later, the sheriff's chance came. Rounding a bend in the Craig Trail, the posse came upon Shorty and the two Craig men busily digging a series of what looked to be fence post holes along the outer edge of the trail, within a couple of feet of the outermost rim of the ledge. The pack horses stood near by.

"Hullo!" boomed Sheriff Cook, startling the workers so that they straightened up suddenly. "Yuh, Shorty; what's comin' off here, I wants to know, an' know dang quick, too!"

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"Post holes," said Shorty lamely.

"I kin see that!"

"I'm diggin' the holes now, an' in the spring, when the weather gits good ag'in, I figgers on puttin' in the posts an' stringin' wire cable betwixt 'em——"

"What fer?"

"I got to thinking," said Shorty, and he paused painfully, "how awful it would be ef some o' them cows got crowded off the trail while goin' er comin', so as a hoo-mane officer——"

"Yuh mean to build 'em a fence along the trail, eh?" finished the sheriff for him. "Is that it, Mister Hoo-mane?"

"Er—yes, sir!"

The sheriff's face went as white as the snow that would be soon flying. Then it got red. Then the sheriff sputtered for a moment, and then he spoke in thunderous tones.

"Hoo-mane officer, eh? Potterin' aroun' to safeguard a few ol' cows when thar's a devil of a mystery to solve an' real work to do, eh? Waal, Mister Hoo-mane, yuh just keep right on diggin' post holes, yuh may still be a hoo-mane officer, but yuh ain't no longer a deputy!"

Shorty made as if to say something, but finally gulped again and set to work. The sheriff eyed him for a full minute and then laughed, pointing a gauntleted hand.

"The way yuh're diggin' them holes is plumb foolish, too," he rasped out. "They ain't deep enough to anchor no post proper. Ef a cow critter brushes up agin' a post set in that kind o' a hole, she an' the hull dog-gone fence'll go over t'gether!"

Shorty wiped a sleeve across his hot forehead. "Hard ground!" he apologized.

"Soft noodle!" quote the sheriff with a snap, and then he waved to the silent posse men and the cavalcade rode around the busy workmen on the trail. "Red" Feeney smothered a chuckle as he glanced at Shorty—the first humane officer the San Luis Valley had ever seen. Some humane officer, thought Red!

The three men back on the twisting trail were soon forgotten, however, as the posse pushed resolutely ahead. They had much work to do, and little time in which to do it, for the crisp air tingled with the threat of snow, just as the weather forecast had predicted it when the sheriff had read it in the Monte Vista post office days before. The sheriff snorted in contempt as they rode past more fresh post holes, along the road. It was evident that Shorty and his helpers had been working hard, anyway.

On the mesa the cattle seemed restless. They, too, scented the coming storm. Craig had good cattle, the best in the whole San Luis, and Sheriff Cook's eyes sparkled as he looked over bunch after bunch, all sleek from the rich grazing the high mesa offered—the best grazing in the whole range country.

Hour after hour then, the posse rode the mesa, eyes keenly alert for the least thing suspicious. They found nothing except a few places, overlooking the bad lands to the west, where cattle, storm-driven, might drift over into the deep, deadly cañons below. There were no dim, hidden trails, however, as far as the riders could tell, and Craig, mentally keeping tab on his stock as the survey was made, finally announced that all head were accounted for except a few dozen that were possibly seeking early shelter in the isolated pine patches that dotted the higher hillocks of the big range. The posse later scoured these groves, frightening up a few cows and calves, but finding nothing else. Sneaking coyotes slunk away as the posse came on, but there were no wolves, apparently, or lions, or other beasts that might, by the wildest imagination, account for the wholesale disappearance of Craig cattle in the blizzards.

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Then, toward dusk, when the mesa had been completely ridden, came the first flakes of snow, and Craig ordered a retreat. It was plain, he said, that there could be but one solution. The cattle went over the steep edge of the mesa somewhere, either to die in the long tumble, or to slide to some lower valley or cañon where they had not been located. The sheriff nodded. That seemed the only solution to the problem. The posse agreed, too. There was no other explanation. They had peered out across the narrow, precipitous Valentia trail and shook their heads at the possibility of cattle going down that in a storm that would block the wider and better Craig trail to the mesa.

Riding back down the Craig trail the posse, in the gathering storm, saw no trace of Shorty or his men. The snow was already sifting into drifts on the trail, whipped by a cutting breeze that swept the higher points. At the Craig ranch, where the cook had prepared a big supper, the posse found Shorty, and there also was "Bud" Stewart and his gang. Bud, riding the base of the mesa, as thoroughly as he could before the storm came, had found no indications of the lost cattle. He had ferreted through the smallest gullies, and into the most distant cañons, but had found no heaped bodies or even trails of living cattle, although he announced that there were places, where, looking up, he could easily see where cattle, before a blizzard, could drop off into space from the mesa.

The storm closed in on the ranch, and through the night the wind howled and the snow beat against the tiny window-panes of the bunk house where most of the men were quartered. Sheriff Cook, in the rancher's cabin, talked far into the night with Craig, who was worried and excited, knowing, as he did from bitter experience, that the storm would cost him a pretty sum in lost cattle.

"This blizzard will cost me five thousand dollars," he wailed, "an' ef we have many more of 'em, I'll be cleaned out altogether!"

The sheriff was thinking of something else. "Can we get out o' here in the mawnin', Jim?" he asked. "Or are we snow bound fer a spell, yuh reckon?"

"Git out? O' course yuh kin," said Craig, "if yuh're ridin' back to Monte, but o' course the trail to the mesa will be closed tight—fer days an' days, unless we have a big thaw, and then she'll be closed for three days at least—mebbe four!"

Morning broke, though bright and sunshiny, to reveal the hills and valley buried deep under a thick blanket of dazzling, packed snow. Breakfast over, a conference was called, and Craig announced that the posse might as well ride home, as it had done all it could do, and there was nothing left but to await the opening of the trail, days later, and then take count of the losses—for there would be losses—he was quite certain of that.

"Well, just as yuh say, Jim," said the sheriff resignedly. "I guess we might as well go home; Shorty, reckon yuh're comin', ain't yuh, seein' yuh can't do no more post diggin' fer a while, no matter ef yuh are a—a hoo-mane officer?"

There was a laugh at that, at Shorty's expense, but the deputy grinned back good-naturedly.

"No, boss—I ain't comin', just yet; I'm goin' back up that trail—left some stuff at the foot I wants to git; an' further, who knows but that dog-gone trail might be open, at that; mebbe thar wasn't enough snow to——"

"Bah!" said Craig. "I know that trail—it's packed so tight a man on snowshoes couldn't make it ef he had the shoes an' knew how to use 'em—which I don't!"

"Nevertheless," said Shorty, "I'm goin' to see; she isn't closed fer a mile or so up, anyhow, an' who knows——"

Shorty's insistence made a hit with

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the posse men. After all, was the trail closed? It seemed foolish to light out for home without making sure of that fact. Bud Stewart, calling the sheriff aside, spoke earnestly, and there was a whisper now and then to the effect that maybe the rancher was taking too much for granted, in saying that the trail was closed. If it was open, there was a chance on solving the whole blamed business right then; if it was closed, as Craig said, then it would take only a short time to prove it—so better investigate, as long as they were there.

"All right," said Sheriff Cook finally, and not half mad about it at that. "We'll try to git up thar ag'in——"

"Useless!" said Craig.

"We'll try it an' see!" said the sheriff. And twenty minutes later the posse were in the saddle. Sheriff Cook and Craig and Shorty and Bud led up the trail. There was plenty of snow. In some places, however, the hard trail was swept clean, and in others the snow was packed so high and deep that the horses floundered in it up to their knees, making the going very slow.

"It's like it always is," said Craig finally, as they toiled on. "We kin go about another quarter o' a mile, an' then——"

Shorty pulled up suddenly and motioned the two Craig men out of the cavalcade, pointing to some stuff high above the trail.

"Thar's that junk I come after," he explained. "Me an' the boys will git it together while yuh others go ahead an' see ef the trail is closed; we'll be waitin' here fer yuh."

Nobody answered him. The two Craig men fell out of line, however, and with Shorty they scrambled up to the stack of tools, covered with burlap, that stood out stark in the wind-swept hillside above the trail. They left their horses on the trail, and the posse, led by Craig and the sheriff, pushed on ahead.

Ten minutes later the posse was surprised by a distant boom, which sounded like a muffled shotgun report. Craig and the sheriff stared blankly at each other, and then Craig spoke.

"Must be somebody ahead, sheriff," he began, but he stopped to point excitedly ahead. "Ah, thar's what it was, the snow! It's a slide, boys; ef that ain't luck!"

And it was a slide. Great slices and glistening cakes of snow and ice split and tumbled away from the trail in a shower of sparkling crystals and rocks and gravel. The posse rubbed its eyes in bewilderment—the snow was clearing out ahead.

"Luck is right!" whooped the sheriff, and he yelled to his men. "C'mon, boys; we're goin' on—it takes more'n a lotta snow to keep Sheriff Joe Cook offen the High Mesa—c'mon!"

The men needed no second invitation. They went. The trail, in those parts that should have been impassable with drifted snow, was more or less clear, for a wonder, and old Craig, pushing his bay along to keep up with the sheriff, shook his head and muttered in his astonishment. He had never seen the like. When he tried, desperate, to get into the mesa after a storm, he had always been baffled, but now—well, it was slick in places, deeply snow-cushioned in others, and heavy, dangerous going, but the riders went through quickly, clambering up the trail with keen anticipation.

"It's a cinch no cattle have come down here," said Sheriff Cook, "or we'd have met 'em face to face afore this, for that slide just opened this dog-gone trail fer us in time to go through!"

"Yes," said Craig, "an' we'll be up thar in time to track 'em ef they do go over the rim or stray near any dum trail we don't know about, or over toward that Valentia trail. But I reckon that trail is still closed tight as a drum, sheriff!"

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They went pounding on, their horses beginning to tire, but when they reached the top of the trail, they did not hesitate. Down onto the white mesa they dashed, riding easily through the lighter fall of snow there. Here and there were bunches of cattle, but it was not until they had ridden several miles across the mesa that they came upon a larger bunch, milling together and apparently in an excited state.

"Looky that!" cried Sheriff Cook. "Thar's a bunch as was preparin' to vanish an' didn't—they're plumb scared."

"Yes, an' they're some o' my best stuff, too!" cried Craig.

"Hoss tracks!" whooped Bud Stewart.

Then, circling the cattle swiftly, the posse men discerned more horse tracks and a trail of them that led away to some pines in a clump a quarter of a mile distant. As far as Craig knew, there were no horses on the mesa, and he shouted that information to the sheriff.

"Guns out!" sang Sheriff Cook. "An' charge them trees. We'll find somethin' interestin' thar!"

They charged—the ten horsemen—snow pellets from the iron-shod hoofs flying up in a fine spray behind. They swept down on the pines, but before they reached them they saw dark figures moving among them, dodging from tree to tree.

"A volley!" ordered the sheriff.

Guns crackled, as a warning, and the posse swept on. The next instant three horsemen broke from the trees in a mad maneuver to outflank the oncomers, but it was hopeless. The posse spread out, fan-shape, and enveloped the strangers before they had time to change their tactics, or to seek shelter again from which to put up a fight.

"José Valentia!" whooped the sheriff, recognizing one of the riders. "What are yuh doin' up here on this mesa?"

"An' Don Quijano an' Joe Gonzales!" cried Craig. "So it has been yuh a-runnin' off of my stock. Waal——"

The Mexicans shrugged. They were caught, red-handed.

The sheriff snapped the bracelets on José, and just then Shorty, on a winded horse, galloped up, to grin as he caught sight of the three guilty-faced prisoners in the midst of the posse.

"Where yuh been?" demanded the sheriff, but not unkindly. "Yuh missed what might have been a good gun fight ef these rustlers had any backbone; we got through the pass after all. We got through an'——"

"Don't yuh reckon I know that?" asked Shorty, a twinkle in his gray eyes. "Of course yuh got through after I got them slides started! That's whar I was, back at that pile o' stuff, where I had my battery an' switch, startin' that doggone slide fer yuh, boss. I wasn't diggin' no post holes like I told yuh yesterday, I was buryin' dynamite an' layin' the set of wires, figgerin' to blow the trail open."

The sheriff's eyes popped, and Craig nearly fell off his horse.

"I knew thar was something funny about that slide," cried the rancher. "An' I couldn't figger out what that boom was."

"It was a smart trick to blow that trail open, Shorty," said Sheriff Cook. "But how in tarnation did yuh figger we'd find them rustlers here, an' how did they——"

"I knew they'd be here 'cause I took good care to blow up the Valentia trail, too. Soon as I saw it the other day, I noticed it was all on the south side o' the peak, where snow never could block it, so I knew the rustlers were comin' in by it whenever they figgered the main trail was blocked, so they'd be safe to work. So I blew it up, too, an' blocked it nice with rock."

Shorty paused. "An' bein' a hoomane officer I couldn't stand by an' see

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no rustlers left lonesome on the mesa, with their own trail blocked, so that's why I blowed out the Craig trail, so that we could drag them rustlers down to our nice warm jail in Monte!"

The sheriff looked at Shorty.

"Pin that thar hoo-mane officer badge on yuhr vest, Shorty!" he barked out, smiling. "Seems to me 'tain't nuthin' to be ashamed of!"

COUGARS RAIDING STOCK IN NORTHWEST

FROM all over the States of Oregon and Washington, reports have been coming in of late regarding the depredations of cougars. These big cats of the Northwestern forests have been making raids on the live stock of isolated settlers, and have also attacked deer, elk, and other game. Although it has generally been supposed that a cougar will not attack a human being, one boy, James Fehhaber, thirteen years old, was killed by one of these beasts of prey near Oleava. The cougar which attacked this boy is known to have destroyed four thousand dollars' worth of calves and sheep near Okanogan. At last reports, Peter C. Peterson, a prominent predatory animal hunter, was out in the mountains trying to run the killer down. All over both States, expert hunters are out for the cougars.

A female cougar measuring seven feet two inches, with forepaws which were five inches across, was killed near Hood River, Oregon, after she had made numerous kills among the calves and colts of that vicinity. E. A. Hull of Yelm, Washington, recently bagged a cougar measuring nine feet from tip to tip. This cat, just before being treed, had killed a four-point deer. From Okanogan, Sequim, Queets, Concrete, Rockport, Wallula, and Falls City reports of the depredations of the cougars have been received.

The cougar is generally considered the most elusive, sneaking, and shy creature of the woods. It is also a most expert hider. In many instances settlers living on the edge of the forest for as much as twenty years have heard the yowling and seen the tracks of the big cats, but have never seen anything of the animals themselves.

THE KAIBAB DEER PUZZLE

THE Kaibab National Forest area in Arizona has lately become overstocked with deep, and it has been a problem with State authorities how to take care of the animals properly. Cal Greer, deputy game warden, believes that the problem can be solved by gathering together the fawns and trucking them out to other areas where the game supply has become depleted. Greer's plan suggests having a competent man with a small herd of milch cows to care for the fawns as they are brought to a central feeding camp by two or three Indians. The fawns would be fed on milk until they would be able to eat grasses. Then they would be trucked out of the Kaibab to the depleted game regions where they are needed. In this way several hundred fawns could be taken out each year. A large number of fawns could be loaded on one truck and in Greer's opinion, very few would be lost. Furthermore, the fawns would not be likely to try to migrate back, following the urge of their instinct, if carried away on trucks.

According to Deputy Warden Greer's statement, fawns can easily be caught by those who know their ways, and if he could get support in the right quarters for his plan, he would be willing to superintend its execution and to take charge of a feeding camp such as that described in the foregoing paragraph.

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A Couple O' Fools

By

Adolph Bennauer

Author of "Nothing bu the Truth," etc.

AS I was sayin'," the boy went on coolly, ignoring the barely audible sniff behind him, "this lizard which I see at the Clear Creek bridge yestidday, was a green one—a green little feller about three inches long, an' he was so tame he was eatin' flies right outa my hand."

Though his remarks were ostensibly addressed to "Solo" Dan, the barkeep, his gaze was not bent upon that person. He was staring directly across the crude bar into the long mirror that backed it, in which he could see clearly the face of the man behind him. And it was the expression on that face which he was watching. "I don't doubt it, Bud," the barkeep declared with forced heartiness. "Don't doubt it for a minute! I once knowed a chap down in the Imperial Valley named Bill Judson what had a gila monster so tame he'd foller Bill around like a houn' dawg. An' when Bill'd roll up into his blankets at night, that there reptile'd jist crawl up an' lay down along side o' him. There wa'n't no livin' thing on the earth or in the air above that Bill were afraid of as long as he had his pet with him."

From the group before him came vigorous nods and murmurs of assent, expressions which it was apparent were intended more as pacification between these two than evidences of belief. But the man standing behind Bud Perkins seemed either ignorant of, or blind to, such intentions. The amused smile that played about his lips changed to an expression of open contempt. With almost pantherlike grace he sidled over to the bar and lounged idly against it.

"Which I ain't disputin' that a lizard or a gila monster or even a horned toad couldn't be tamed," he stated clearly. "Takin' that lizard out at the Clear Creek bridge, I've fed him flies myself. Reckon I learned him that trick. But it shore is amusin' how color blind some folks kin be. That lizard ain't green—he's brown!"

There was a perceptible backward movement on the part of the crowd. Solo Dan immediately lost all further interest in the argument and devoted his attention to mopping up the farther end of the bar. Plainly this antagonism between Bud Perkins and Lafe Mortimer had reached a stage where outside interference was useless.

It was an antagonism which, though utterly without grounds, was no more than natural between two young men so evenly matched in age and physique and temperament as Bud and Lafe. Not

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that either of the two was bad. But in a community as small and uncivilized as Chuckaluck, they could not hope to oppose each other for long without a show-down. And this show-down required no greater provocation than the present. A direct assertion from the one, no matter of how trivial a nature, an equally direct refutation by the other, and the affair must end in gun play.

Bud did not answer that challenge immediately. He still stared into the mirror, almost smilingly now, as if the prolonging of the unavoidable issue were intensely pleasing to him. Then he took half a step backward, so that the top of the bar would not impede the movement of his arm. He cleared his throat.

"This here lizard which *I* see at the Clear Creek bridge yestidday was *green,"* he said distinctly.

Lafe Mortimer did not change his position, but his face had darkened. "Meanin', in plain English, Bud, that I'm a liar?" he suggested.

The crowd caught its breath sharply and, as by magic, an open lane appeared from one end of the room to the other. A moment more and that room, they knew, would echo to the crash of guns, two crashes, perhaps, and one or both of the men would fall. Yet even as Bud Perkins opened his lips to speak the words that would precipitate this clash, the little wicker doors at the front of the establishment swung open and a harsh voice shattered the silence.

"Put 'em up, you locoed mavericks! Reach for the ceilin'! You hear me?"

Undoubtedly the pair heard, for the bull voice of Jim Sterrett carried easily across the street. And so authoritative was the sheriff's command that it penetrated their inflamed intellects and caused them to wheel simultaneously upon the speaker. One glance at the brace of .45s in Sterrett's hands, and their anger cooled visibly. Instinctively, almost comically, their own hands went upward.

Still keeping the men covered, the burly sheriff stepped forward. His usually florid face was red, his gray eyes snapped with anger and resentment. A brave man and a just, who played no favorites, he addressed the pair impartially.

"For the last time, Bud an' Lafe," he ground out savagely, "I'm tellin' you this infernal naggin' has got to stop. I'm plumb sick and tired of it! You've been causin' me more worry than all the stick-up gents an' cattle rustlers in the county put together. Some day you'll be throwin' down on each other when I ain't around, an' then I'll feel guilty of somebody's murder. It's plain that Chuckaluck ain't big enough to hold the two of you, an' one of you has got to go!"

He uttered the last sentence with the finality of a judgment, his capable-looking .45s proclaiming that he meant to enforce that judgment to the full. And for a moment it appeared as if he would have the need of his guns. For the antagonism that had existed between the two offenders before united now against a common foe.

"He said I was color blind," flared up Bud hotly. "Said I couldn't tell a green lizard from a brown one!"

"He called me a liar," echoed Lafe with equal fervor.

The big sheriff made an impatient gesture with his .45s.

"'Which I don't care who said it or what was said," he returned doggedly. "The p'int is that either one or both of you gents has got to get out o' Chuckaluck an' stay out. And he's got to get out to-night! You can take your choice. Which'll it be?"

But neither of them wanted to go, and finally it was agreed to have Dan, the bartender, toss up a silver dollar: heads —Bud would go; tails—Lafe would go.

A low murmur, half expectant, half fearful, filled the room. Every man present stepped forward as Solo Dan, not

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without reluctance, dug into his pocket and brought forth a silver dollar. And every eye in the room was upon that coin as, shot upward by his stubby thumb and forefinger, it spun momentarily in the air, to be caught again dexterously by him and palmed upon the bar. For a moment Solo Dan's hand continued to cover the coin as he looked sympathetically, almost apologetically, into the white faces of his two best customers. Then, with a sigh he removed his hand. Tails lay uppermost.

In the instant of poignant silence that followed, all eyes turned upon Lafe Mortimer. In those glances was neither pleasure nor disappointment, for as between him and Bud Perkins there was no preference among the citizens of Chuckaluck. They were merely curious to see how he would accept this turn of fate. But before he could recover from the chagrin which claimed him, Jim Sterrett once more assumed command of the situation.

"You, Lafe," he pronounced crisply, "pack your roll an' hit the trail! I'm givin' you one hour to get out o' Chuckaluck. If you ain't out by then, or if you ever show up in town again, I'll slap you into the cooler for a year. Now, keep your hands up an' start travelin'!"

The sheriff's words seemed to bring Lafe back to himself. His dazed expression relaxed, and he drew himself erect, his gray eyes flashing with a mixture of hatred and contempt. For an instant he allowed his glance to pass over the crowd, noting no sympathy and caring for none. And then his eyes came to rest upon those of his enemy.

"All right, sheriff, I'll go," he declared grimly, his gaze never leaving Bud's face. "An' I ain't figurin' on soilin' my boots with Chuckaluck mud no more. But somewhere, some time, me and Bud Perkins is goin' to meet up again, an' when we do, it's goin' to be a case o' shoot on sight!"

With his head up and that consuming fury still in his eyes, he started toward the entrance.

"That goes for me, too, Lafe," came Bud's quick rejoinder, "an' it'll be the man who shoots first that lives!"

Lafe ignored the taunt, pushed open the swinging doors, and passed out into the night. It was a summer night, black as the proverbial hat, but in the mood which swayed him then Lafe Mortimer could not have distinguished between daylight and darkness. Purely by instinct he found his way to the rail where he had hitched his pony, and it was through instinct alone that he guided the animal through the congested street and turned him at length into the trail that led out to the Buck-eye Ranch.

Once on that trail the pinto took charge of matters, himself, and it needed no touch of his master's spurs to make him put forth his best. But the devil was riding with Lafe just then, and no speed could satisfy him. So great was his hatred of Chuckaluck and all that it contained that he could not get away from its environs quickly enough. As he urged the pony on with vicious jabs of his heels, he imparted to the night the burden of his thoughts.

"Framed me, that's what they done," he stormed. "Sterrett an' Dan always was partial to Bud. How do I know that toss-up was fair? I never seen the other side o' that dollar! Well, it don't make much difference now. I ain't one to stick around where I ain't wanted. But if I ever meet up with that coyote again—well, there's sure goin' to be some shootin'! Don't tell me he didn't know that lizard was brown! He jist said 'green' to start somethin'."

Naturally enough, Lafe had no desire to reveal his humiliation to any of the Buck-eye boys, and he was relieved when he drew near the ranch and perceived that the bunk house was in darkness, advertising that its occupants were all in town. Avoiding the owner's resi-

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dence, where a single light in the living room told him that the old man was still up, he pussyfooted the pinto down to the bunk house, made a compact roll of his bedding, despite the Stygian blackness, and five minutes later was departing without a request for his time or a word of farewell.

Embittered as he was by his treatment at the hands of Jim Sterrett, it pleased him to imagine that not only the sheriff's crowd but all the world was against him. And when a full-grown man harbors such thoughts as these, it is high time, indeed, that he were betaking himself elsewhere.

Lafe had no particular destination in mind as he rode away from the Buck-eye Ranch, yet as Chuckaluck lay to the south, he was just perverse enough to choose the north. In that direction lay the open desert, a vast expanse of sand and alkali flats where not even a sheep-herder's hut redeemed the virgin solitude. It was a short-cut, however, to Horseshoe Basin, where some of the best cattle outfits in the county were located, and Lafe was not afraid of it, for he had crossed it before. He knew where to find water there, and the question of food did not trouble him, for his horse would be able to make the trip easily in a day. Besides, he welcomed this opportunity to be absolutely alone with himself, to turn his back for a time, at least, upon everything that bore a resemblance to the human race. So he swung northward after he passed the boundary fence of the Buck-eye Ranch, and the sage and the blackness swallowed him.

Dawn was breaking when he reached the first water hole. He dismounted here and tarried a moment to refresh himself and his pony and refill his canteen. When he started on again, the sun was just clearing the eastern horizon. Ordinarily sunrise meant nothing in Lafe Mortimer's life, for when one worked for the Buck-eye outfit, he saw them only too often. But there was something about this particular sunrise which arrested his gaze and brought a light of concern into his gray eyes. Though there was not a cloud in the sky, the orb of day seemed in some miraculous fashion to have lost its usual light and heat. It was visible now only as a huge red disk shining through a haze. While not in any sense a desert rat, Lafe was experienced enough to know what that haze portended. He gave a low whistle of astonishment.

"A sand storm! Can you beat it?"

In his predicament he saw three ways open to him; to return to Chuckaluck, to remain at the water hole, or to keep straight on. The first alternative he dismissed without a moment's consideration. He knew that Jim Sterrett never went back on his word, and he had yet to meet the sand storm that could bluff him into spending a year in jail. The second alternative, that of remaining at the water hole, he likewise dismissed after due reflection. The only advantage the spot afforded him was water, and he and his horse had already refreshed themselves and his canteen was full. Besides, being without any grub, he could not afford to spend much time upon the desert. His most logical course was to keep straight on, trusting that the storm would blow itself out before he reached it. Dismissing all further thought of the matter, he pressed his heels into the pony's flanks and started forward.

But Lafe had not calculated the direction in which the storm was traveling, nor the strength of the wind that lay behind it. He had left the water hole scarcely an hour when he ran directly into it. And then he would have been willing to spend two years in jail to be safely back in Chuckaluck. The wind was a veritable hurricane, smiting him like a solid wall, driving the fine particles of sand through his clothing and into the flesh beneath. To face that

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continuous blast was impossible. He dropped down off his horse and screened himself behind the animal's body, hoping that a storm so violent would soon exhaust itself.

Instead, it grew speedily worse. Ten minutes more and it had become so bad that he could scarcely breathe. His terrified horse, plunging from side to side, no longer offered him any shelter, and, blinded and choked by the stinging sand, he was forced to his hands and knees, his brain reeling. It was then that he thought of his water. If he moistened his neckerchief and tied it across his mouth and nostrils, he might, at least, be able to breathe more freely. He remembered that he had left his canteen tied to his saddle, and with prodigious effort he staggered erect and looked about for his horse. And then from his bruised lips came a cry of keenest anguish. For the pinto, crazed by the storm, had started back to Chuckaluck and was now too far away for any call to reach him!

Sheer terror left Lafe momentarily incapable of any action. Without water or a horse, how could he hope to survive such a storm as this? Half an hour more and he would either choke to death or go violently insane! Indeed, incipient insanity was upon him already, for, scarcely conscious of what he did, he wheeled about and brandished his fist furiously in the teeth of the driving blast. And in that act he suddenly paused, his heart beating wildly, his eyes straining frantically to pierce the almost impenetrable haze. Was this an hallucination, or was it real? Not a hundred yards ahead of him loomed the blurred outlines of a prairie schooner, the horses staggering against the traces, the canvas top swaying from side to side as if threatening each moment to be torn from its fastenings!

Whether real or not, that spectacle was to Lafe as the proverbial straw is to the drowning man. Arms outstretched, crying vainly against the fury of the storm, he staggered toward the phantom, which he now saw was moving directly across his path and would soon be swallowed up in the obscurity. His fear of losing this, his only hope of rescue, lent him the strength of a dozen men. And as he slowly but surely gained upon the vehicle, he perceived that it was no hallucination, but very real, indeed. Through the opening in the rear he could glimpse a woman's face. Moreover, he realized that he, himself, had been observed, for the woman started up suddenly, called a summons to the driver, and the wagon stopped. The reaction to that discovery was too much for Lafe. His strength and will broke together, and he sank upon the ground in a semi-stupor.

How long he remained in that state he could not have told, but when he opened his eyes again he found that he was lying upon some blankets, on the floor of the wagon, which was continuing its slow progress across the desert. The sand storm had blown itself out by now, but through the aperture in the rear he could see that the air was still filled with sand, an atmosphere so dense that the eye could not penetrate it beyond a radius of a thousand feet. His face felt strangely damp and cool, and there was a wetness in his throat which told him that water had been administered to him in plenty during his period of unconsciousness. At a slight intake of breath beside him, he turned his head to stare into a pair of the widest, bluest eyes he had ever seen. And he discovered then that she whom he had mistaken for a woman was hardly more than a girl whom it would have gladdened any man's eyes to rest upon.

All unconscious of his admiration, the girl sprang to her feet.

"He's awake, dad," she called eagerly.

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The old man on the seat dropped the reins, permitting the horses to plod along without guidance, and stumbled back to Lafe's side.

"Um-hm! I told yuh he'd come around all right, Em'ly," he commented, stroking his gray, tobacco-stained beard while he beamed kindly down upon their patient. "Reckon yuh *air* all right, young man," he added, somewhat anxiously.

Lafe rose slowly to a sitting posture, exercised his limbs a bit, drew a long breath, and grinned reassuringly.

"Fit as a fiddle, thanks to you both," he declared, though it was obvious that he stretched the truth a bit in saying so. "If my hoss hadn't got scared an' bolted, I'd be ready to start on my way again. As it is, I reckon I'll have to ask you for a lift to the next town."

With an apologetic smile he turned back to the girl, his manner indicating that he felt no regret at all for being forced into such pleasant company. "What place was you headin' for, miss?"

A hint of shyness had crept over the girl, now that her patient had so fully recovered, and she dropped her eyes at that direct question.

"We are going to Chuckaluck," she replied evenly.

"Chuckaluck?"

Lafe Mortimer could not conceal his exclamation of dismay. To be heading back to the very town he had risked his life to escape from! Of all the unkind tricks fate had played upon him, this seemed the worst. And while he was still struggling to recover from that blow, the old man broke in upon his thoughts.

"Ya-as, we heerd they was openin' up some small tracts around Chuckaluck, an' we was aimin' to locate there. Yuh acquainted down that a way, mister?"

Slowly Lafe regained control of himself. But the smile had left his eyes now and became replaced by an expression of bitterness.

"I figger to know Chuckaluck pretty well," he grimaced. "I jist come from there. Name's Mortimer—Lafe Mortimer!"

Father and daughter beamed upon each other, and the girl turned upon Lafe quickly. "Then, perhaps, you know my brother, Bob Perkins—'Bud,' I believe the boys call him?"

Lafe Mortimer's face went as blank as a stone wall. To the pair gazing upon him so eagerly, he must have looked like a fool. And he felt exactly like a criminal. So this was Bud's dad and his sister, the last two people in the world from whom he deserved any kindness! Incipient panic clutched his heart at the thought of it. Far better to have taken his chances in the sand storm than to be rescued by *them!* Certainly he could not go back to Chuckaluck now. On some pretext or other he must leave them. He must buy some grub and water from them and strike out for Horseshoe Basin once more on foot. What if he did run into another sand storm? Anything was better than remaining here!

Yet as these thoughts flashed swiftly through his mind, he realized that the two were waiting for him to speak. He composed himself with an effort.

"I was jist tryin' to place the feller," he stammered confusedly. "Seems like I *do* recall him. Young chap about my own age workin' for the Two Bar O! Yep, I reckon that'll be Bud Perkins."

Again father and daughter exchanged glances, and the old man's features lighted warmly.

"I'm right glad to know yuh, Mr. Mortimer," he declared. "An' seein' as yuh're so well acquainted with Chuckaluck, I'll feel a heap easier in mind to have yuh come along with us. I ain't never been down this way afore, an' durin' that sand storm I sort o' lost my bearin's. But it seems to me I ort

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to have struck the Chuckaluck Trail long afore this."

His mind still busy with the perplexing problem of how he could part company with his benefactors without giving offense, Lafe was brought out of his reflections with startling abruptness. Up to now he had given no thought to the direction in which they were traveling, taking it for granted that all was well. But old Perkins' words caused him to turn quickly and glance through the opening in the front of the vehicle. In the center of that aperture he could see the sun shining dimly through the yellow haze. That meant they were traveling east, the same direction in which the two had been traveling when they picked him up. And the trail to Chuckaluck lay not ahead of them, but to the south and five miles behind!

Like a flash Lafe was made conscious of his predicament. If he left his companions now they would never be able to find their way to Chuckaluck! Even if he accompanied them back to the Chuckaluck Trail, there was small chance that they would be able to follow that trail in the dense haze that now encompassed them. Very likely they would wander away from it within an hour, and, heading east or west, lose themselves in the greater expanses of the desert where they might succumb from thirst before they passed out of it. If, on the other hand, he escorted them into Chuckaluck, he not only faced the problem of spending a year in jail, but of meeting Bud Perkins. To the first consideration he paid little heed, but he was bound to the second by his oath. And yet how could he draw a gun upon the son and brother of those who had saved his life?

It was a predicament which, even had he been given plenty of time to decide, he might never solve to his satisfaction. And as matters stood, he was given less than a minute. The eyes of the old man and the girl were upon him as before, waiting for him to speak, and with an impulse born of desperation, he chose the line of least resistance.

"I should hope to remark, yuh've lost yuhr bearin's," he cried as he rose jerkily to his feet. "Yuh crossed the Chuckaluck Trail when yuh picked me up! Lemme handle them hosses, pardner, an' I'll show yuh a short cut that'll take us back to it."

Without waiting for the old man's reply, who seemed for the moment too astounded to speak, he stumbled forward, took possession of the reins, and swung the horses about in a southwesterly direction. Perturbed as he was, he would much have preferred to be left alone, but the old man and girl, recovering from their surprise, took seats behind him and immediately beset him with a thousand questions regarding Bud Perkins, Chuckaluck, and their prospects of success at dry farming. At first he answered those questions only in monosyllables, steeling his heart against any show of sympathy, but gradually he warmed to the two in spite of himself. As the afternoon wore on, he found himself looking at this girl with new eyes. Hopeless as he knew such a fancy to be, he was struck with the realization that here was a woman who would make him a good wife!

Lost in such pleasant daydreams, he took no thought of the passage of time. It was not until hours later, when a gradual clearing of the atmosphere warned him that they were passing out of the desert, that he was brought back to his surroundings. Then he saw that they had approached to within three miles of Chuckaluck. The old man and girl could not possibly miss it now, and he, himself, had not yet been observed by any of the citizens. Then why should he go on—on to face probable death and imprisonment when escape lay behind him? The answer was so obvious that none but a fool would have hesitated. Yet, strangely enough, Lafe Mortimer

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chose to be that fool! Or, rather, he found himself powerless to act otherwise. For he realized that once he left this girl's side he would never lay eyes on her again, and no fate which Chuckaluck might hold in store for him seemed quite as cruel as that.

So Lafe deliberately turned his back upon escape and went forward to meet the issue. As he drew near the town, he expected almost any instant to have Jim Sterrett descend upon him and take him into custody. But Chuckaluck was enjoying his siesta at that hour, and it was not until he turned into the main street and drew abreast of the hotel that he was recognized. Then the three men who lounged upon the veranda steps sat up suddenly and stared at him. And the nearest of the three, he discovered with a start, was Bud Perkins!

Though recognition between the two was simultaneous, there was no hostile demonstration. Bud had recognized his sister in the same instant that he had recognized Lafe, and with open mouth and widened eyes he started toward her. Aware that this was not a meeting to be witnessed by strangers, yet loath to leave for fear of being accused of cowardice, Lafe clambered down from the seat and started forward, obviously to tie the horses. But as Bud passed him, he addressed him quietly over his shoulder.

"I'll be waitin' at Solo Dan's—in case you want to see me!"

Just a fleeting glimpse he caught of Bud's face as he turned away, but the latter's sudden flush was enough to inform him that he understood, and that the arrangement was satisfactory to him.

So Lafe waited at Solo Dan's. For fifteen minutes he waited, sitting at a table in a secluded corner, smoking one cigarette after another, totally oblivious of the stares of the proprietor and the two customers who lounged against his bar, his mind centered upon Miss Perkins. He was wondering what she would think of him after Bud got through painting his character. No doubt that young man would ply a colorful brush, and it remained to be seen whether he had not made a consummate ass of himself by returning to town. If, in addition to being forced to fight Bud and spend a year in jail, he were to be repudiated by this girl, he would have suffered a fitting punishment for his folly.

The clip-clap of the little wicker doors awoke him from his lethargy with a start. Bud picked him out the moment he entered, and came forward slowly, his fingers hooked about his belt, his head slightly bent, his eyes regarding Lafe intently beneath his hat brim. He did not stop until he reached the table. Then, stiffly, he inclined his head. "My sister told me all about it," he stated civilly, avoiding the other's eye. "You played a man's part there, Lafe! I shore appreciates it."

That was all he said, but, in view of what Lafe had been expecting, those words sounded like an abject apology. Almost afraid to believe his ears, he blinked stupidly up at Bud, while he struggled for a suitable rejoinder. He could not allow Bud to think that he had done all the favors.

"Shucks! It weren't no more'n I ought to have done, seein' that they saved my life," he returned carelessly. "I reckon you ain't under any obligations to me on account o' that, Bud. An' if you're willin' to admit that that lizard was brown——"

He paused suggestively, his cheeks flushed, his eyes meeting Bud's squarely. But if he had entertained any hopes of a reconciliation, he was doomed to disappointment. In fact, the thought that his words should have been thus misconstrued, seemed to bring back all Bud's former antagonism. He took a step back from the table, his hand reaching instinctively for his gun.

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"Admit nothin'," he snapped out, his voice carrying to all parts of the room. "I says that lizard was green, an' green he is! If you'll just step out to the edge o' town with me, where we ain't likely to disturb anybody, we'll settle this matter once an' fer all!"

For a long moment they stared at each other, two foolish, overgrown boys, forgetting the very point of their argument in the wave of stubborn pride which swept over them.

"Suits me, all right," was Lafe's equally curt rejoinder, and while Solo Dan and his two customers stared, they started with grim determination for the entrance.

The boundary line of Chuckaluck was marked on the south by Clear Creek, distant three blocks from Solo Dan's, where the main street terminated in Clear Creek bridge. It was toward this spot that Lafe and Bud headed, swinging along side by side, their gaze bent directly before them. And it was because his eyes were thus elevated that Lafe, walking on the right-hand side of the road, did not see the tiny lizard basking on the sun-baked boards of the bridge until he was upon it. But intuition warned him to side-step just in time. And as he did so, he stopped and pointed the reptile out to Bud with an exclamation of triumph.

"Reckon that'll be our little friend, there," he declared scornfully, "an' if that lizard ain't brown, I'm a sheep-herder!"

His attention attracted by Lafe's outstretched finger, Bud, too, stopped to stare at that insignificant cause of their difference. And on the instant his jaw dropped and his eyes widened. The lizard was undeniably brown!

But he recovered himself quickly. "Sure! This one's brown," he admitted defiantly. "But it ain't the one I was feedin' flies to yestidday. That one was *green.*"

Lafe's smile lost none of its triumph. "It's the same lizard," he declared confidently. "Look here!"

As he spoke he swept off a fly from one of the bridge timbers and, dropping to his knees in the short grass, held the insect out to the reptile. Without an instant's hesitation the lizard started toward him and within an inch of his hand its tongue flashed out and the fly disappeared. Grinning broadly, Lafe turned back to his companion.

"Seein' that I'm right on both points," he declared, "I reckon you'll have to admit that our little friend is brown!"

Yet, even as he gazed at Bud, he saw the latter's expression of chagrin change to one of amazement.

"Brown?" he gasped out. "I'll admit, he *was* brown, Lafe, but look at him now! If he ain't green, what color *is* he?"

With a frown of impatience Lafe glanced back at the lizard. And then his eyes, too, lighted with amazement. For the little creature was no longer brown, but green—as green, almost, as the blades of grass which surrounded it!

Rendered speechless by that amazing transformation, the two could only stand there and stare. And as they stared there sounded from behind them a low chuckle of amusement. Wheeling simultaneously, they found themselves face to face with the sheriff and Solo Dan! It was from Sterrett's lips that that chuckle had come, and now he amended it with a few enlightening comments.

"If there's anybody around here that's green, I reckon it's you two," he declared caustically. "If you knowed a little more about that kind of a lizard, you'd never have used him for an excuse to start a fight. He's what them perfessor chaps calls a chameleon. He ain't rightly any color. He's what you might say, changeable, an' when he's out huntin', he adapts hisself to his surroundin's so the flies won't spot him so easy. Reckon you can savvy that,

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you locoed longhorns, or do I have to send for a book an' show it to you in print?"

But there was no necessity for the sheriff to carry out his concluding offer. Astounded as both young men were, it was apparent that they had grasped the phenomenon clearly. By common assent they turned from the sheriff to gape at each other.

"Come to think of it, he was always on the bridge when I seen him," stammered Lafe.

"An' he was always on the grass when I seen him," said Bud, grinning.

Sterrett was not slow to perceive the psychological advantage of that moment. "Right you are," he agreed heartily. "An' if you're willin to admit that you've been a couple o' fools an' will agree to hold the peace hereafter an' forever, I reckon Chuckaluck will be glad to extend a welcome hand to both o' you."

It was for just the briefest moment that the eyes of the two held. Then, impulsively, Lafe's hand went out to Bud.

"Reckon, you wasn't color blind, after all, Bud," he said.

Bud's hand met his halfway. "An' I figger it was a brown lizard you seen, at that, Lafe," he returned, flushing. "S'pose we mosey along toward the hotel, now. Sis told me to be sure an' bring you back with me!"

LONG'S PEAK CLAIMS TWO VICTIMS

TWO daring mountain climbers, a man and a woman, essayed the ascent of Long's Peak, in Colorado, a few weeks ago. The woman was Miss Agnes W. Vaille, secretary of the Denver chamber of commerce. The man was Walter Kiener, of Denver. They made the ascent successfully, but as they came down, they were caught in a tempest of snow and wind. The thermometer which Kiener carried showed fifty degrees below zero. By the time they started on the descent, it had become dark. While going down a slope, the young woman slipped and rolled one hundred and fifty feet before she stopped. The pair struggled desperately against the forces of nature through the night, and in the early morning, Miss Vaille found that her feet and hands were frozen. She was unable to go on. Kiener tried to carry her and stumbled along with her in his arms for a while, but finally had to give up. He then propped her up in the lee of a boulder and pushed on by himself to get help. He managed to reach the Timber-line cabin, callapsing just as he got within hailing distance. A rescue party near the cabin heard his shouts and went to his aid. He described the plight of his companion, and the party at once set out in the face of the blinding snowstorm to the girl's rescue. The second victim of the storm was a member of this rescue party, Herbert Sortland, an employee of Long's Peak Inn. He turned back from the quest and perished in the snow drifts. When the others reached Miss Vaille, they found that she had succumbed to exposure to the bitter cold.

As a member of the Colorado Mountain Climbing Club, Miss Vaille had scaled all but sixteen of the peaks of more than fourteen thousand feet elevation in America. Her father, F. O. Vaille, is a retired Denver millionaire, and was on his way home from a trip to Honolulu when his daughter met with her untimely end.

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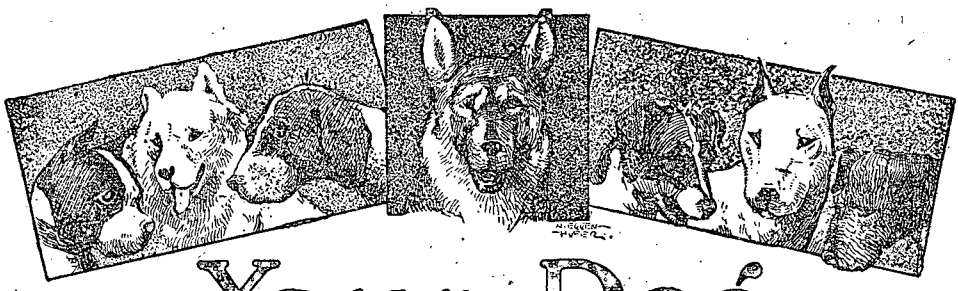

Your Dog

By David Post

Author of "The Bull Terrier," etc.

THE FOX TERRIER

"DANCING SUNSHINE" is a phrase often and correctly used to describe the disposition of the once most popular member of the terrier family—the fox terrier. I say "once" because there was a time in this country when, not only on the dog show bench, but along the village street, around the barn or in front of the hearth, it led all others in numbers. In speaking of the past partiality for this breed I refer to the smooth-coated fox terrier; at the present time the wire-haired fox terrier, which, save for a difference in coat, is a replica of the smooth, is making rapid strides toward regaining the great prestige the breed once held.

Just why this merry, tremendously affectionate and useful type faded out for a time is difficult to determine. Of course it is true that for some persons a fox terrier is not a restful dog to have about the place, particularly in the house. He is constantly on the move, and he greets his returning master with such bounding, leaping demonstrations of love that the owner, if tired, is forced to tie up his little pal so as to gain rest. More nervous than any other breed of dog, the fox terrier, it must be admitted, is a "yapper," and his sharp, penetrating and, at times, seemingly unending barking can certainly become more than irritating.

The modern fox terrier was developed by English huntsmen. The dog gets his name from the fact that he is used by hunters to rout out foxes which have been holed, or, to use the technical term, driven "to earth" by the hounds. When this happens to Reynard, some member of the hunt gallops back to the kennels for the fox terrier, or, as happens in many instances, the little dog has gamely followed along with the pack or the huntsman, and, if somewhat in the rear, soon comes dashing up to play his part. The last time I saw a fox terrier called upon to display his prowess was during a hunt last fall. The fox had sought refuge in a long drain. The mounted huntsman of this particular pack did not have to wait till one of the whips rode back to the kennel, nor wind his horn long and hard to hurry the fox terrier to the drain, for he had a small specimen of the breed pack up behind him as an Indian squaw carries her papoose. Set upon the ground, the little dog took only a short time to "unearth" Mr. Fox.

Possessing the most highly strung nervous organism in dogdom, fox terriers are inclined to be snappy, and on this account I do not feel they are a

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good dog for small children, who are of an age when it is hard for them to understand that a dog has "feelin's."

Fox terriers are tough, easy to raise, and incessant rodent hunters. I have in mind one who, in its frenzy to get a rat, will rip down the side of a barn and tear up half the lawn in its pursuit of a ground mole.

So, if you want a dog with "pep," who will give you more action and outward demonstrations of affection than any other, also the best living burglar alarm in existence—get a fox terrier.

The following is the standard which fox terriers should approach as nearly as possible:

Head—The skull should be flat and fairly narrow, and decrease in width slowly to the eyes. There should be just a little "stop," and when viewed in profile, a slight break in the line of the nose and forehead. For those who have missed previous articles, I will say that "stop" is an indentation between the dog's eyes. The cheeks must be free from fullness. The jaws should be muscular and of fair punishing strength. There should be little falling away below the eyes, but the foreface should have some unevenness of contour. The muzzle should taper gradually to the nose.

Nose—Black.

Ears—Small and V-shaped. Of fair thickness, they should droop forward close to the cheeks.

Eyes—Small, dark, rather deep-set, and as nearly as possible circular in shape. They should show intelligence and vigor. The rims of the eyes should be dark.

Teeth—The upper teeth should overlap the lower.

Neck—Tight-skinned, muscular and of fair length. It should widen gradually to the shoulders.

Shoulders—Should be long and sloping, laid well back, rather sharp at the points, and well defined at the withers.

Chest—Deep but not broad. The fore ribs should be arched, the back ribs set far back, and the dog should be close coupled.

Back—Should be short, strong, and straight. There should be no slackness anywhere.

Loins—Slightly arched and very powerful.

Legs—Must have strong bones and must be straight. The ankles of the forelegs should be inconspicuous, and the pasterns should be short and straight. The hind legs should be muscular and without droop or crouch; the thighs should be long and strong; the legs not straight at the stifle joint; the hocks should be low, and the terrier should stand well up on them.

Feet—Small and round; the soles should be hard; the toes should be fairly well arched and should not turn in or out.

Stern—tail—Should be strong and set on high; should not be carried curled or over the back.

Coat—of the smooth fox terrier—should be smooth and close, but hard, and should cover even the belly and under side of the thighs.

Of the wire-haired terrier—should be "broken." The harder and more wiry the texture the better. The dog should not look or feel woolly, and there should be no silky hair about the poll or elsewhere. The coat should not be so long as to give the dog a shaggy appearance, but it should show a marked difference all over from that of the smooth species.

Color—Principally white. Red, brindle, or liver markings are not good.

Weight—Usually not more than twenty pounds.

General Appearance—The dog must give the impression of liveliness, gaiety, strength, endurance, and speed.

In next week's issue I will tell you about the Airedale terrier—an unusually popular dog.

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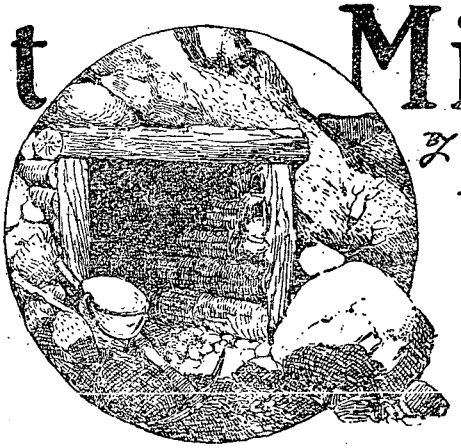
Lost Mines



by Roderick O'Hargan

THE ZEEKOE DIAMOND MINE

FOR forty years the South African diamond fields have seethed with stories of lost mines, or perhaps, better stated, hidden mines. The government tax and the "I.D.B. Act," especially the latter, have been, in some ways, a direct incentive to the hushing up of "finds." A strike in the diamondiferous belt of the Transvaal or Orange Free State is not heralded by the hoop-la stampede of our Western mining camp life, but rather by excited whisperings and "sneakings-out" at night.

The dreaded "I.D.B." or Illicit Diamond Buying Act was enacted to suppress the traffic in stolen stones; in short, "highgrading" as practiced in Nevada and elsewhere. So stringent were the provisions of this law, that any person found in possession of an uncut diamond, of which he could not give immediate documentary explanation, was forthwith punished with great severity. Consequently when a finder, perhaps unlicensed, spotted "a pipe," his first thought was to find out how rich it was. If there seemed to be a reasonable chance of washing out fifty or a hundred thousand dollars within a short time, he often counted discretion the better part of wisdom. He would grab his stones and bolt out of the country. If he did not actually cover up his leavings, at least he kept mum about the whole affair. Sometimes his leavings were considerably greater than his takings and might lie undiscovered for years, especially if the area passed into private hands—parties, perhaps, not interested in "dee" mining.

Sometime before the South African War, it would be in the eighties or nineties, a sudden flutter occurred in the underground diamond channels of the Pretoria district. The famous "Raindrop" diamond had appeared in Amsterdam, Holland. According to the whispered story, the Raindrop had been turned up on the banks of the Vaal River. Just where, when and by whom —hush! hush! But out of it, the rumor that the mysterious fortune stone had come from the Zeekoe district, persisted and persisted, so much so that the stone became known as the Zeekoe Raindrop.

The secret service corps of the "Trust," expended all their efforts to discover the origin and history of the Raindrop. If they were successful, which according to public belief they were not, then the facts are hidden in their secret archives. What a human story of wealth and poverty—joy and

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sorrow, tragedy, aye, and even comedy are hidden in those documents!

But every story must have an ending. For more than forty years it seemed as though "finis" never would be written to the mystery surrounding the discovery of the great Raindrop diamond. Now, in the year 1924, chapter two opens!

On July 18th last, the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian,* England, cabled the following news story:

CAPETOWN, July 18th.

Three thousand people, including "poor whites," experienced diggers, students, clerks, and even girls took part in the wild race to peg claims on the new diamond diggings at Zeekoefontein, on the banks of the Vall River, this week.

A few weeks ago a Mr. J. J. Tromp bought a farm in this vicinity, a poor, desperate sort of farm hidden away on a lonely part of the veld. Once in possession of the farm, however, he discovered diamondiferous soil, and began working a valuable claim with some two hundred natives, which is now returning him an average of from two thousand pounds to three thousand pounds a week. According to general practice, therefore, the government declared the area surrounding the farm a proclaimed area, and fixed a day this week for the rush. No fewer than two thousand claim licenses were taken out during the three days preceding the rush, which thus made the event one of the biggest diamond rushes ever held in South Africa.

On the day appointed, nearly two thousand men and boys formed the far-flung line behind the mining commissioner, Mr. C. M. Jack, and his detachment of mounted police. A few athletic girls showed prominently in the waiting crowd. The long proclamation was read as the runners clashed their iron pegs and impatiently swayed in readiness to rush.

Soon after eleven o'clock struck, the last words of the proclamation were read, and the line of flags was lowered in unison. So began the greatest rush ever seen by the mining commissioner, who has had many years of experience in the Transvaal.

For five hundred yards the path was cleared. Youngsters in shorts and football jerseys and hardened old diggers drew ahead. Twenty donkeys charged before the oncoming rush, and thousands of Kaffirs on flanking kopjes raised a continuous cheering. A volley of curses ran out here and there as the more impetuous stumbled against their fellow runners or blundered over boulders to the ground. Trousers were torn and ripped by the thorn bushes, and many of the runners fell by the way. But the great mass rushed on down the gully which rapidly closed over the final four hundred yards to where the site of the rich alluvial deposits lay around the owner's mine, which extends from the edge of the running water in the great sandy river bed. For one hundred yards between the rocky ridges pegs were feverishly driven in. Several disputes occurred, but these were quietly settled by the officials.

"My largest stone," Tromp, the owner, said, "has been one of thirty-four and one half carats, and it was a Cape Byewater stone, but I am receiving from twenty pounds to twenty-seven pounds per carat for the finest class of my stones, and this is a price far above the average for South African diamonds."

Chapter three—assuming that Tromp's Zeekoefontein farm was the cradle of the famous "Raindrop"—will probably open with the announcement of the discovery of another "big un." In the meantime, Tromp's present crop of stones, valued up to four thousand dollars each, is, in diggings parlance, "juicy pickings."

PLANTS TWENTY THOUSAND TREES A DAY

TREES at the rate of twenty thousand a day have been planted by farmers in western Canada in the last twenty years, according to a report of the Canadian agriculture department. The report shows that a total of one hundred and fifty million trees have been distributed free to farmers in that section since 1905. Early maturing varieties, suited to climatic conditions were supplied by the government. Canada's tree-planting campaign in western Canada was intended to transform the landscape of the prairie provinces.

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GRUB

By Edgar Daniel Kramer

THOUGH I'm too wise to be claimin'
That I am an epicure,
Who knows all about good victuals,
Of this one thing I am sure:
There's one tasty combination
That I've never known to fail—
Give me coffee, beans an' bacon,
When I'm ridin' on the trail.

Though some chaps are always tellin'
Of the fancy grub they ate
In a café down in Denver,
Candor forces me to state,
While I'm ridin' with the cattle
To the settin' of the sun,
Give me coffee, beans an' bacon,
An' the ridin's only fun.

The great gods upon Olympus,
So at least I have been told,
Supped ambrosia an' nectar
From rare cups of gleamin' gold,
But, if they were punchin' cattle,
When the cookie blew his blast,
They'd grab coffee, beans an' bacon,
An' they'd taste real grub at last.

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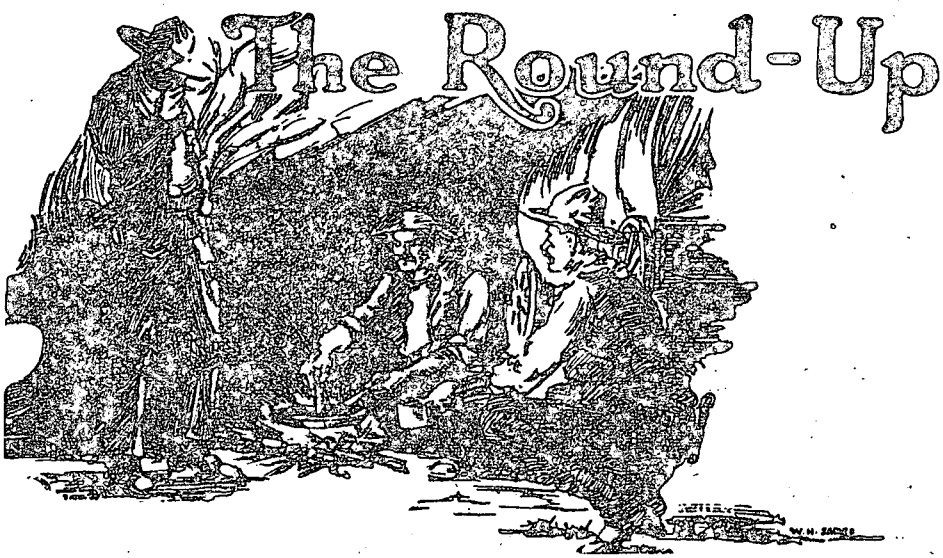

HOW to get out your shootin' iron right smart, and shoot, *and shoot straight,* that sure is an important thing to be able to accomplish with greater speed than the gent as has got designs on your life. Joe Mix, of Spring Wells, Michigan, as is goin' to speak first this evenin', says he's powerful fast on the draw, so listen most attentive like to what he's got to say:

"Just finished reading where some one was interested in quick-draw work. I do not know who is considered the fastest quick-draw artist at the present time, but I have practiced with a Colt's .45 single action for some time and I am considered lightning on the draw. I have a record of less than half a second on draw and one shot—that is, with both hands above the head. I have drawn and emptied the gun, which is six shots, in less than three seconds. This is not fanning the hammer, but pulling it back for every shot. If anybody knows of any one at the present time who is faster than that with single-action .45, I would like to hear of it, through your magazine. I have a few suggestions to make to any one desirous of learning quick draw.

"The gun should hang well down on the hip—well back, not too far forward. The holster or gun case should have the leather cut out where the trigger guard is and the hammer of the gun should stick up above the holster. In reaching for his gun, the quick-draw artist does not look to see if his hand is going to get the gun right; he never takes his eye off the man in front. It is always best for the beginner to practice pulling his gun and not fire it till he gets the proper action to draw. He should not pull the hammer back first, but put his finger on the trigger first and then pull the hammer back. The holster should be tied down tight to the leg, and the strings should be at least eighteen inches long. I will be glad to talk further in private or in public on this subject."

We allus feel like we should ask pardon when we get to talkin' hoss stuff. But, folks, honest, we just can't help it. We'll promise to tie it down as tight as we can, bite it off as short and sweet as possible, but when we get goin', them as don't like hosses had better just walk out on us, as the actors say. But we think that Toots O'Regan, Curry, Montana, has got a grand hoss spiel, and we

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like mighty well to hear what he's got to say, and to have you listen in, too. Go it, Toots:

"HOWDY, Boss: The Belle Fourche Kid and Hackamore Slim know their stuff when it comes to breaking hosses. There are several good ways of breaking hosses, but here is one way that will turn out a gentle-broke one every time.

"First, keep all fools and cowards out of the corral. To halter-break a four-year old, don't use a war bridle; tie him out on a log that he can't drag too far and let him picket-break himself. Watch him close the first day so he won't tangle himself up and get killed. In about two days he finds that he can't get away and that he must avoid getting tangled up.

"Lead him in the corral, lay him down, tie up a hind foot kind of short, and let him up. Take a slicker or blanket and sack him out on both sides. Slap on the blanket and saddle several times so he quits flinching when you do it. Cinch up fairly tight for he is apt to bloat up on you. Climb on and have the foot untied and ride him around the corral several times. If you sacked him out good, I'll gamble he won't buck. If he tries to, pull his head up. You want a gentle hoss not a buckin' one. Ride him ouside the first few times with the hackamore, then later use a snaffle bit and later a curb bit. Remember a green, grass-fed bronc is soft, so don't ride him down, because it don't take them long to play out. Better give him fewer hard rides and more handling till he savvys how to carry a man and kyak.

"This plan won't suit a bronc peeler who likes his half broke and treacherous. Well, I invite criticism and arguments. So long, folks. See you later.

"TOOTS O'REGAN,
"Curry, Montana."

And now, please just hark ye to George C. Clark, Gainesville, Florida. He's a dandy boy with a hoss, and it's a lot he wants to say about them, and of saddles, too. We ask you, George, to tell 'em:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I have been a reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for some time, and enjoy the magazine very much.

"As a lover of horses, I feel like saying a few words in regard to breaking them. I have tried breaking them both ways, gentle-breaking, and busting, and while it takes longer to gentle-break a horse, it pays in more ways than one. I have a half-Morgan stag I ride now, who was five and a half years old before he ever saw a saddle. He was caught and gentled, and from that day when he was first ridden until now—he is eight years old—he has never pitched. He stands up for three and four months at a time, grain fed, and when taken out to ride, all he attempts to do is to prance and act like his feet were too good to touch the ground. I haven't given him three months actual work in his life. However, I am planning on riding him through to Michigan next summer, in search of health, as I am an ex-service man, with a bum heart and lung. So I am in no shape to ride hard any more, especially mean horses.

"My brother believes in good old busting and he usually has a fight out of his horse every morning. He has absolutely ruined the spirit in several horses he has broken, and they were not worth a darn as cow ponies, no life, no energy, just plugs.

"I have three saddles and a McClellan, such as was used by the army. The latest saddle I have was Frazier built on a special Fremont tree, sixteen-inch swell, fourteen-inch tree, medium high cantle, double rigged. I had it made for the horse I have now, my favorite. The bars of the tree are built extra wide, due to the fact that the favorite's back is broad and level and with real low

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withers. I used a hair blanket, which I consider the best, as I have never galled a horse's back, or had one get sore on me.

"Saddle number two is Wyeth built on a bull-moose tree and is easy riding, but is hard on a horse's withers, without using a mattress under it. The bars of the tree are too closely built. Saddle number three is built on a half-breed Visalia tree, but is rather hard on the rider, as the seat is inclined to be flat. The McClellan is all O. K. for those who like it, but not for yours truly.

"I would like to see a discussion on saddles, blankets, shoeing, and various other horseman's equipment. But please quit harping on Spanish bits. I use a low port racking bit with a curb strap and can control any horse with it."

Come on, you trappers, help this lad out. Write out your particular pet recipe.

"DEAR EDITOR: Here's saying hello and the best of luck to all the gang! I just happened in for a minute to ask if any member of the gang has a good recipe for treating small hides such as squirrel. I feel sure that I will be able to get one out of all the readers of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, as they must reach in to Alaska. Well, I see that the log is most burned out, so let's all turn in for a good night on the prairie. Good night and pleasant dreams.

"CHARLES STEVENS,
"41 Spring Street,
"Springfield, Massachusetts."

TRAPPER ATTACKED BY WOLVES

ACCORDING to a newspaper report, Mate Papanin, a trapper on Little Pine Lake north of Seagram, Ontario, Canada, some months ago staggered into Longlac, well-nigh exhausted. He had a thrilling account to relate of his encounter with wolves. He had been out on his trap lines, and found a wolf caught in the farthest one. He skinned the animal, placing the hide in his pack, and then made for home.

Shortly afterward he heard wolves howling, and he judged from the direction of the cries that they were consuming the remains of the dead wolf. Then, to use Papanin's own words, "they came on my tracks, singing." Being an experienced trapper and woodsman, he was not much concerned, he says. When they broke from cover and advanced slowly, growling and showing their fangs, he counted sixteen.

This rather terrified him, for he had never seen so many wolves in a single pack before. The wolves advanced to within a hundred feet and then paused. Papanin securely bound his ax upon a stout pole with the aid of moosehide thongs from his pack, and advanced on them. They retreated a short distance. As he retreated, he says, the animals followed him, and that the leader actually snapped at his trousers. Then he went into action, and killed the animal. Without stopping to skin the wolf, the trapper made tracks for Longlac. The pack stopped to feed on their dead leader, and then they took up the cry. He says he reached the town just ahead of the pursuing pack.

According to the best authorities on animal life and traits, the wolf never attacks a human being. We give the story, therefore, just as it came to us. There is no way to verify an account of this kind, which is probably substantially true. In spite of the assurances of naturalists, we think most men would not care to come face to face with a wolf pack.

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Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

ANOTHER proof that the world's full of people with kind and loving hearts has just been dropped into the old Hollow in the shape of a grateful letter from Billie West. Remember Billie? The lad who lost his parents and was looking for a home? Well, offers of homes just poured in to little Billie from all over America, and "I have found a kind mother and daddy who loved me from the start as I did them," writes the happy boy. Billie sends his thanks to all those who responded to his call.

A brother who's "looking for people who want to be friends with some one who really wants to have friends," says:

I am a cowboy to a certain degree. I don't live on a ranch where there are herds of cattle and all that sort of thing, but I follow the rodeos and round-ups. All I own in the world is a relay string, but I find that in the life I lead any other possessions are hindrances. At the rodeos I participate mostly in riding bucking horses and roping steers. If you like it, there's just one thrill after another.

I was raised on a ranch in Texas; I'm twenty-four now. After I graduated at the high school in San Antonio, I decided that cow-punching was too hard a life and took a course in journalism. That was time wasted, because I went back to the old routine, and now I wouldn't give it up for all the newspapers in the country.

Won't some of the gang write to me? I am anticipating a trip to California in June, so of course would like to hear from some one there, but any letters are welcome. Don't get it into your heads that because I am a cow-puncher I am hard-boiled. Some people who don't know, have cowboys cracked up to be pretty tough, but they aren't any more so than the ordinary run of human beings.

Waal, I reckon I'd better swing my laig over my cayuse and fan the breeze.

BUCK SIDELL.

Hotel Heppner, Heppner, Ore.

A native daughter of Oklahoma wants to join our friendly circle.

HELLO, GANG: I was born and bred in Oklahoma, but am mostly Irish. I try to look on the sunny side of life and gather courage from it to face what I have to from the darker side.

I have been out here in California for a year and a half, and find it very interesting and very beautiful in places, and it is also true that there are spots as undesirable as you see anywhere else and conditions that one does not approve of. It is fortunate as to location, in its climate, and as for scenery, it has plenty, but as we all know, there are wonderful beauty spots all over the world.

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It holds its own as to wealth, thanks to the tourists. I am glad to see that Oklahoma is coming to the front in this respect; for so many years it was considered to be just about the jumping-off place, and this was a mistaken idea.

I am just one of the mass of working women, and for years have known nothing else but hard work. I don't mind it so much, either; I find that life has an abundance of riches for those who seek for them, not in dollars always, but in keeping a cheerful outlook, enjoying to the utmost the small pleasures that come our way, be it the song of a bird, a gleam of moonlight on the ocean, or the strain of music from behind some home window as you pass along.

LILLIAN PENNYWELL.
1209 Lime Avenue, Long Beach, Calif.

A word from South Africa.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I wonder if any of The Gang would be interested in hearing about the Hartebeestepoort Dam. This dam is situated about twenty-three miles from Pretoria; it is fourteen miles long, and about seven wide. I visited the same spot a few years ago before any plans had been made. There was absolutely no water there except in a small river running about six inches deep. The river runs between two hills, and between these the dam wall was built.

It is a marvelous piece of engineering, being five hundred yards from hill to hill, while the foundations are laid two hundred feet deep, and rise sheer one hundred feet above the level of the water. The depth at the wall is about fifty feet, whereas in the center of the dam it would be quite two or three hundred feet.

You can imagine what this great expanse of water could be used for. It was actually built for irrigation purposes. On the outlet side irrigation canals have been built from reenforced concrete for hundreds of miles, to farms and towns.

The Hartebeestepoort Dam has been described as the finest inland resort of Africa. There is boating, trout fishing, swimming, an up-to-date hotel, garage, parking space, everything for the visitor. In the line of boats they have everything of the latest in this country, steam launches, motor launches, yachts, ordinary rowing and racing boats of all description. On the lake regattas are arranged on most public holidays and Sundays. The wall is wide enough for two cars to pass one another, there being a roadway over. A beautiful concrete roadway has been constructed to the lake and one can reach it in about half an hour on a motor cycle or in a car. For people who have no motor cycle or car a railroad is at their disposal.

Should any of The Gangsters ever come to this country I would be delighted to take them to this beautiful dam.

GEO. W. BODMER.
Box 89, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa.

Jim Milligan, 23 Hill Street, Springburn, Glasgow, Scotland, wants a correspondent interested in boxing or scout activities. He is nineteen and a rover scout.

"I am a Scotchman thirty-four years old and would be very pleased to hear from those who know Arizona, Mexico, or California, particularly any little known or unexplored parts," writes Wm. A. Struthers, 8 Whitehall Place, Aberdeen, Scotland.

Something to remember—

Twenty-five cents in stamps or coin sent to the Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, will bring you either a Hollow Tree button to be worn on the coat lapel, or a Hollow Tree pin.

Douglas R. Luxford, 72175 Fenchurch Street, London E. C. 3, England, is thinking of coming to America and would welcome information and advice. His hobby is the breeding of Alsatian wolf dogs, and he'll gladly answer questions about them.

Miss V. Coombs, 7 Gideon Road, Lavender Hill, Clapham Jct., London, England, is especially interested in hearing from sisters who live on ranches.

"I have a cozy little home in a small village and want to find some congenial woman between twenty-five and forty who would like to make her home with me and help me with my bit of house-

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work," writes Mrs. G. A. Curry, Cloud Chief, Oklahoma. "There would be only we two, and she would have plenty of spare time to do what she liked."

Pearl Jelama, R 5, Vancouver, Washington, asks for "stacks of letters from everywhere." She's twenty and lives on a prune ranch near old Fort Vancouver.

"My husband works in the oil fields and is away a great deal, so I get very lonely. I'm twenty-five years old and have lived in the West all my life; I'd like letters from the East and from England." Address Mrs. Ruth Morton, Salt Creek, Wyoming, sisters.

Mrs. Josef Rechen, Jr., box 86-a, Shepard Avenue, Mount Carmel, Connecticut, would like to correspond with Gangsters who are interested, as she is, in the raising of rabbits, especially odd breeds.

"I am a Western cowgirl twenty-three years old, longing to hear from Gangsters who're interested in the West and its activities, such as rodeos, ranching, riding the trails, et cetera. My home is in the mountains, and my horse is my only pal," Elma E. Davis, San Ardo, Monterey County, California, tells us.

Eleanor M. Seaverns, 64 Cliftondale Street, Roslindale, Massachusetts, will welcome letters from sisters in any part of the country. She likes outdoor sports, especially basket ball, is fond of music, and enjoys good plays and movies.

Miss California is seventeen and lives on a small ranch. Will other cowgirls, or sisters who like outdoor sports, especially horseback riding, write her? Send her letters in my care.

"I would like to hear from sisters who live in the West near oil fields or mines or on ranches," Mrs. Florence Davison, of Marion, Michigan, says.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I want to find one real friend. Perhaps that one will see this in The Hollow Tree and answer. He may be any age from twenty to fifty; actual age doesn't matter so long as one is young in spirit. I am in the prime of life, have lived an outdoor life, and enjoy all sort of sports. My hobby is photography, and I like to travel.

I've had many friends, but it seems that one by one they slip away; what I want is one who will stick, have the same interests I have, and write me in full confidence of the things that make life worth while.

Have had a varied career—actor, cowboy, soldier, so any one who is interested, please write and I will answer.

TRUE BLUE.

Care of The Tree.

DEAR GANG: I left home when I was a child of ten, and am now thirty-two; I have traveled all this time. My first years I spent in the northern Arctic Ocean; I have been in all European countries, also in thirty-five parts of the Black Sea and Mediterranean; also to China and New Guinea.

On this side I have traveled from Montreal, Canada, to Cape Horn, South America. Will be able to give special information of the West Indies, the mulatto boys who defy sharks in the water, diving for coins thirty feet deep.

I have visited all the cities of the east coast States, but know little about the Western States.

Am a great lover of dogs, like any kind of animals, in fact. F. J. E.

Care of The Tree.

A FREAK DEER

TWO hunters a short time ago shot a freak deer on the Bathurst Road, near Bathurst, New Brunswick. The animal had eight legs, and it could walk backwards or forwards with equal ease and celerity, it is reported. In fact, as the hunters reported, it possessed "a new kind of gear shift among quadrupeds."

The strange freak has since been sent to a taxidermist to be mounted. Science eventually will find it a name, but for the present it is known as "the octopedic wonder."

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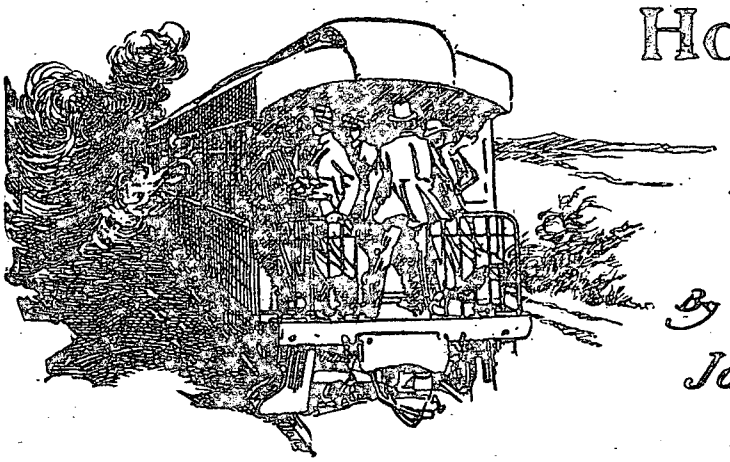
Where To Go and How To Get There



By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

TWO WOMEN TRY HOMESTEADING

IN order to strengthen some of the points I have been making in the course of this series of articles on homesteading and land settlement in the West, I am going to yield the floor to Miss Stella Wiltermood, who has an interesting story to tell of her actual experiences in proving up on a government homestead in the mountainous part of San Diego County, near Campo, California. A careful study of this narrative will, I believe, remove the idea lurking in a good many of my readers' minds that a government homestead is a quick and easy road to independence. It will also show, however, that the thing *can* be done even nowadays, but that indomitable pluck, unusual ability and perseverance, and some little capital are required. Here is the story of how two women homesteaders achieved their ambition:

About two years ago, I was a stenographer in Los Angeles, and as I am a lover of the great outdoors, I was hoping to own a little ranch somewhere, where I could raise chickens and have a fine garden, but the opportunity never seemed to come, until one day I saw a notice in a newspaper about land being offered to war veterans. That set me thinking about taking up a homestead. I thought my mother would scoff at the idea, but, on the contrary, she was delighted. Our friends thought we were most foolish to attempt to live in the wilderness, especially without menfolks for protection, but our minds were set on owning a ranch where we could enjoy so much freedom, and we did not heed their warnings.

We sold our equity in the bungalow we were buying, bought a cheap car, some hiking clothes and supplies, and with some directions from the land office, set out to discover our new home.

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drove for days on the different roads in the back country of San Diego, and from all indications it appeared that there was no government land, unless it was straight up in the air, with no signs of water or kindling wood. My mother was beginning to get cold feet, and I must admit that I was somewhat tired and discouraged, after several blowouts and car trouble in general, and after viewing so much barren land near the Mexican border, miles from the main road, over rocky trails.

We slept wherever we happened to be, and the evenings were delightful. The moon came up so big behind the mountains, and the coyotes made music around midnight. It was September, a good month to sleep outdoors. We always tried to camp near a ranch, and sometimes the ranchers insisted that we have supper with them and stay overnight, and you may bet we were glad to accept! Most of the mountain ranches raise bees, also goats, and we had all the milk and honey we wanted.

Nobody seemed to know where there was any government land worth living on, and we couldn't find any. It had all been taken up years ago; but one night we were stopping over with a rancher who lived in a pretty spot near a mountain stream where there are plenty of trees. I guess fate came to our rescue here, because this man told us where our homestead was to be found.

He said he was renting the land he was on and that every year the rent was raised. This did not make him feel particularly friendly toward his landlord, and he therefore offered to show us one hundred and sixty acres of government land that the landlord had claimed as his own for over twenty-five years. Eighty acres had been cultivated for several years. There was water—several good springs, and an old gold mine full of clear mountain water. There were trees—sycamores and oaks—which meant wood to burn. The land was rolling and looked fine. We asked this man why he did not file on it, and he explained that he had once taken up a homestead in Colorado, so was not entitled to any more government land. He showed us an old road to the main highway that could be fixed up in first-class shape for about one hundred dollars. We certainly were happy that night, and the rancher and his family helped us celebrate.

The next day we started back to the land office. When we got there we found that the homestead we wanted had been filed on about thirty years ago, but that the young man who had had it did not prove up because his health failed, and he went to Arizona, where he died later. So all that time the homestead had been as a part of the adjoining farm, but not rightfully so.

Our next move was to drive back to San Diego, where we ordered lumber for a three-room cabin and hired a carpenter. We wanted the lumber hauled in one load, as the hauling charges were very high. The lumber company had no trucks which they would send out that far, so we hired a man with a real large truck, and he assured us that he would make the trip O. K., and do it in one load. So we led the way in our flivver.

About fifteen miles out, we began to notice that the big truck was having trouble making a grade, and it began to dawn on us that the truck must be an ancient one that had been dolled up. We came to a creek, and the truck got stuck fast. Mother said she didn't know whether the truckman was trying to put in as many hours as possible—he was being paid two dollars an hour—or whether it was just our hard luck. Every time the truckman tried to pull out of the creek the wheels went deeper, until it seemed that the lumber and truck would be wrecked. The man was furious, and said that if he had realized

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that there was any such wild country in San Diego County, he wouldn't have attempted the trip for five hundred dollars.

A large auto happened along, and the people in it offered to try to pull the load out of the mud. After about two hours, this was accomplished. I offered to make it all right with these kind people—I think they were Mexican ranchers—but they wouldn't take a cent.

He heaved a great sigh of relief and continued the journey. A little later we began to climb a high grade, and something went wrong with the engine. The truckman said it was the end, and that he couldn't go any farther. So he had to unload. We paid him what we thought just, and he told us in strong language that we were a couple of "crazy janes" to try to live in such a rock pile, and that he would get the balance of his money in court.

Night was coming on, so after this lecture and the departure of the truckman and his feeble truck, we camped near the lumber for the night. The moon was having a vacation, and the silence and darkness, miles from a ranch, made us a little nervous, but after a while the sandman got us.

The next day we drove until we came to a farm, and inquired about a truck. No truck was to be had, but we hired a farmer with a big wagon and four mules who said he didn't care how many loads it took. He was going to help us all he could, and make the price right.

We therefore left it to him to get our lumber up the grades and went on to our ranch and had the carpenter come out and put up an army tent for a temporary abode. We bought a little furniture for the tent and had it hauled out by the fruit-express truck that goes to Imperial Valley. The next day the farmer finished bringing the lumber, and he surely did good work. We were fixed cozily in the tent, and were all ready to begin the new house.

The windows for the house were placed up against the end of the tent outside. About ten o'clock that night I heard a noise—a continual gnawing—so I decided that a shot would scare the animal, if that was what was making the noise. I got the trusty shotgun and fired. There was a crash of glass. I had shot through one of the windows. The next morning we found that field rats had had a feast in our cupboard.

We thought we would take a walk over the ranch while waiting for the carpenter to arrive, so we went toward the old gold mine. Soon we saw bats and big monkey-faced owls flying out of the mine. Our dog, Jack, was having great fun chasing these birds. Farther up, in a cañon, we found the remains of a cabin. We also found a jar of tea in an old broken cupboard. We kept hunting and found an old wooden mallet with the initials of the man who first had filed on our claim. These relics were about thirty years old, and they looked it.

Going back to the mine, we discovered an old mine car in the water. I took a stick to test the depth of this water and found that it was very deep. The channel runs back under a mountain and forms a reservoir.

The house was well mapped out and we were very happy that everything was going along smoothly once more. Toward evening, a wind storm came up and increased in velocity until, at about eleven o'clock, the tent would stand up no longer. We held the center pole as long as we could, but finally the tent came down, leaving the pole standing. We had space enough under the tent to stay until morning. Then, with the help of the carpenter, we managed to get our tent up again. We put rocks all around it to hold it fast. We patched the torn places and got settled once more.

About two weeks later, the roof of the house was on and one room partly

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finished, so we had our trunks hauled out and began housekeeping in one end of the house. Everything was serene, and we began dry farming. We put in potatoes, lettuce, et cetera. We had a small yard for our baby chicks.

Then, one evening in the first part of November, another wind storm arose, and we became worried when the roof began to sway. After two hours of this wind, we decided to get under the old tent once more, which was lucky for us, as at about one o'clock in the morning the roof blew off—tar paper and all—and if one of those two-by-fours had hit us, I wouldn't be writing this. We were astounded at such weather in California, especially in San Diego County. Then it began to rain in torrents, and of course everything in the roofless house was drenched. We managed to keep pretty dry under one end of the tent, but we got cold and stiff before morning.

We dried things out a little the next day and then got into the car to go in search of a place to stay until our house was finished. We found that the farmhouse where the man who directed us to our homested used to live, was now vacant, so we moved in temporarily.

Finally we got moved into our new house and it was delightful. The sunrise and sunset thrilled us. The colorful mountains and all the birds made everything so cheerful. We planted bulbs and had a nice garden started, but the tops on the potatoes soon disappeared, as did the lettuce. The China-lily bulbs never came up. The rabbits got all our dry-farm vegetables, and the field rats ate the bulbs. Later the skunks and coyotes made off with our poultry.

One day, in exploring the ranch, we found a large mound, and when we dug into it, we found large clam shells —no telling how old. Under the clam shells we found an Indian arrowhead and an implement like a rusty spear, some hollowed stones resembling small bowls, and some rocks with ridges in them which might have been used as slingshots. This was romance indeed, to imagine that Indians once roamed these mountains.

We have several pet canaries, so we decided that it would be nice to put them in an aviary out in the yard. We had it built high, so that no skunks could get the birds, and we had the wire doubled. One morning, we heard Dick, our trained roller canary, making a queer sound, and investigated. There was a young rattlesnake with half its body squeezed into the cage. He had eaten the two baby birds and was trying to get the mother. I felt faint; but shot the half of the snake that was on the outside of the cage.

We found that our springs were used by swarms of bees for drinking fountains, so I hunted all over the homestead for the hives where these bees lived. My mother was suffering from two bee stings, so it was high time to investigate. I found a man on one end of *our* homestead, living in a small cabin, with about two hundred hives about the structure. I told him that he would have to put his bees somewhere else, as I had taken up the claim. He told me that some one had leased him the corner of land for ten years and that he would not move his bees. He explained that he lived in the cabin only now and then, when it was necessary to get honey, et cetera, and that his permanent home was a big ranch a few miles away. He said that miners had built the cabin years ago.

I went to the district attorney's office and had notice served on this man to move his bees, but the bees stayed. So I got another bee man to load all the hives—in two loads—on a truck and take them near the owner's ranch. Later on, the miners' cabin disappeared, and I suppose the bee owner had it removed.

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We have had the road leading from our homestead fixed up and some of the water piped around and have had some nice trees planted for a windbreak. We also have a coyote-and-skunk-proof fence for our turkeys and chickens, and things are beginning to be more peaceful on the rancho. The meadows are most beautiful in spring when all the different wild flowers are in bloom. We have a rock and cement front on our cabin now, so that it cannot blow down any more. We have burned so much brush that I'm sure the rattelsnakes won't like the place in future.

Several of our friends come up to hunt rabbits on the old homestead and they are surprised at the progress we have made. If they knew of the stormy time we had to get such a home, they would not wish for a government claim. It *is* nice after one learns how to farm, and I think we will do well with our poultry this year for we have worked unusually hard. Our sense of humor is what buoyed us up time and time again. We could always see the funny side of our troubles. We call our place "Mountaintop Manor."

Thus ends the tale of the adventures of these present-day homesteaders—two courageous women, who had the hardihood to tackle a government claim and subjugate the wilderness. Even at that, they were lucky in many respects, as the narrative shows.

THE LAST OF THE FORTY-NINERS

DOWN from Placerita Cañon, in the hills near Newhall, not far from Los Angeles, California, as the crow flies, comes the news that West Harris McKean, familiarly known as "Old Mac," has crossed the Great Divide. From the year '51, when he was a young man, until his death some weeks ago, McKean never did anything but pan gold. Throughout the countryside of Placerita Old Mac was reckoned the last of the Forty-niners.

"West" was not a nickname for McKean. He was christened in the days when the West was newly famous as the land of heart's desire. He came from Missouri, like many early California pioneers—Missouri the mother of the West. He was a farm boy of Scottish parents, and from them he inherited frugality and adherence to the church of his fathers.

As a lad he crossed the plains, mostly on foot, in the year 1850. He arrived in Hangtown at the height of the gold madness, and in the years which followed he made several small fortunes and lost them trying to make larger ones. As the years went by, and the placer diggings failed, he finally found himself in the little cañon of Placerita, and he has lived there—almost forty years—ever since. In all that time he never visited Los Angeles or the nearer town of Newhall.

He panned gold until his bent form could not stand the toil any longer. Then he lived alone in a little shanty on what is now the ranch of Alex McGregor. Kindly neighbors supplied him with food, and the old man was his own cook and housekeeper. He was ninety-three years old at his death, and his battered gold pan was his most valuable possession.

"I have lived alone all my days," he told some friends shortly before his death, "but I don't want to rest that way. So bury me in a cemetery where I shall have good company and be lonely no longer."

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MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

BOATMAN.—Has any one by that name ever lived in Peace Valley, Missouri? Any information will be appreciated by Mrs. A., care of this magazine.

MEREDITH, NORMAN.—He is English by birth. An old friend is very anxious to get in touch with him, and will welcome his present whereabouts. Mrs. A. B., care of this magazine.

LOHAM, ALICE.—She was living in Texas some time ago. A relative would like to find her, and will welcome any helpful information. Mrs. A. B. H., care of this magazine.

BARRON J. J.—His wife's name was Jane McCallum, and they were living some time ago in Shelburn, Indiana. Please write to William McCallum, 31 Church Street, Hamilton, Scotland.

MILKPAW, VOLNEY.—He was last heard of in Oregon. Please communicate with your half-sister, Ada Balderson, who is anxious to hear from you. Mrs. T. C. Brightman, care of Gulf Producing Company, Box 88, Breckenridge, Texas.

CARTMILL, CHARLES E.—He lived in Huntington, West Virginia. Please write to Walter W. Champer, U. S. S. "Idaho," Division C, San Francisco, California.

WALSH or **HOMANS, GEORGE.**—He was working as an automobile mechanic in Chicago, Illinois. Information will be gladly received by his son, George Walsh, 752 Tenth Avenue, New York City.

MORRIL, BERT WILEY.—He is forty-two years of age, and was last heard of in September, 1918. He left Salt Lake City, Utah, for San Francisco, California, and it was later reported by friends that he was working in a garage near Oakland, California. It is supposed that he is going under an assumed name. His mother is worried over his absence, and will welcome any helpful information. Mrs. Lillie Taylor, Box 534, Salmon, Idaho.

GIBBONS, JACK.—He was in Pontiac, Rhode Island, from 1908 to 1909. Please communicate with Sarah Jones, care of Mrs. T. Mulkearns, 39 Lexington Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

GLISSON, RENDER ROMAN.—He is twenty-two years of age. He left Anderson, Tennessee, six years ago, and went to Montana. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will confer a favor by writing to Carrie, care of this magazine.

ALLEN, TOY and **FLONIA.**—They were in Fairland, Indiana, in 1918. Please write to your sister, who has been looking for you for some time. Mrs. E. W. Bast, 831 West Richmond Street, Chicago, Illinois.

CREIGHTON, Mrs. F. C.—Mother, why don't you or Marion write to me. Jack and I have been searching for you. Mrs. Jack Fisher, Pope Valley, Napa County, California.

FLEMMING, BILL or **JIM.**—He is forty-five years of age, six feet in height, has gray curly hair, and blue eyes. He was in Tacoma, Washington, in 1919, and is probably now in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Please write to Mrs. Mae Conaty, Junction City, Oregon.

BOWLES, GEORGE, JOHN, and **CHARLES.**—They were last heard of in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, four years ago. Their uncle would like to get in touch with them, and will welcome their present whereabouts. S. H. Bowles, care of this magazine.

HOFFMANN, JERRY.—He was living in Oklahoma. He is five feet five inches in height, has light hair, blue eyes, and weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Please write to your friend, who is at present in Oregon, but expects to go back to Iowa in the summer. Myrtle, care of this magazine.

JONES, REX.—He was known as Tiney. He was a collector, five feet two inches in height, has dark complexion and hair. Please write to an old friend, who is lonesome without you. Myrtle, care of this magazine.

MIPICK, LOUISE.—She is twenty-two years of age, five feet two inches in height, has blond bobbed hair, blue eyes, and weighs one hundred and two pounds. She left Maine, in September, 1924, and went to Melbourne, Florida, with Mr. and Mrs. C. S. Arbo and her five children. Please write to Lou if you see this. C. P.

HANDLIN, EUGENE.—He was in Phoenix, Arizona, ten months ago. He is sixteen years of age, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. His mother is worried over his absence, and will welcome any helpful information. A. L. Handlin, Box 552, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

WHITMAN, MARJORIE.—Any one knowing her present whereabouts will confer a favor by writing to V. Fioring, 66 Windom Avenue, Arrochar, Staten Island, New York.

WAMBOLT, EVA.—She was in Tacoma, Washington, in September, 1905. Please communicate with L. Bruner, Dockton, Washington.

DOUGLAS, F.—You have the right to stay away if you wish, but please let us hear from you, as we love you and wish you to return. Sister, 1127 West Twenty-seventh Street, New York City.

PRETZ, BILLIE or **NOLA.**—She left Topeka, Kansas, and went to California in 1921. Her old friend would like to get in touch with her, and will appreciate her present address. Mrs. Irene Winters, 1140 West Thirty-seventh Place, Los Angeles, California.

WILLIAMS, LEONARD P.—I wrote to you at Newark, New Jersey. Please let me hear from you, as I have news for you. L. T. Williams, 1808 Broadway, Indianapolis, Indiana.

HARRIS, WALTER J.—He was in Eureka, California, in December, 1923. He is twenty-four years of age, five feet eight inches in height, has brown hair and eyes, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. He was discharged from the navy on February 15, 1921. Please send all helpful information to Mrs. W. B. Harris, care of McClards Store, Crystal Route, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

SMITH, M. O.—I have written several times to the address you sent me, but have received no reply. Please get in touch with me at once. Mrs. M. R., Box 494, Maryville, Tennessee.

BARNETT, ELEX.—He was in Sterling, Illinois, several years ago. He is fifty-seven years of age, five feet seven inches in height, has dark-brown hair and eyes, and has blotches on his face. His daughter is very anxious to hear from him, and will welcome his present whereabouts. Elsie May Barnett, 3819 Eighth Avenue, South, Seattle, Washington.

WILL, W.—Please send your address to Theodore.

CLAPP.—She left her home on East Ninth Street, Ada, Oklahoma, and was married in 1917. Later, her parents moved to Sapulpa, Oklahoma. Any one having any information will confer a favor by writing to T. S. Helm, Camp 61, Big Creek, California.

HILL, JENNIE.—She was living in Glens Falls, New York, from 1919 to 1920, but all mail sent there was returned unclaimed. Please communicate with Henry Meyers, Scotia, California.

McPHERSON, JAMES.—He was in San Francisco, California, in 1906. His brother would like to hear from him. William McPherson, Box 318, 25 South Street, New York City.

HUNTER, ROBERT.—He was in Baltimore, Maryland, in October, 1924. He is requested to write at once to Box 318, 25 South Street, New York City.

CUMMINS, WILLIE.—He is nineteen years of age, has dark hair and eyes, and was last heard of in Alva, Oklahoma. All mail sent to him was returned unclaimed. Please write, as your family is worried over your absence. Send all information to Mr. W. A. Myers, R. 4, Walters, Oklahoma, or Mrs. Zella Calfry, Box 63, Walters, Oklahoma.

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CLAY, ROGER E.—He served in the United States navy, and later went to Charles, North Carolina. Please write to an old friend, Darrell Hall, care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, ELAM.—He is fifty years of age, and was last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. Please notify E. C. Williams, R. 2, Box 207, Gadsden, Oklahoma.

NORDEMAN, A. LUCY.—She was living in San Francisco, California, in August, 1919, and in 1921 she wrote a letter from Berkeley, California, which was lost in the mail. Please communicate with Dwight E. McKeehan, care of H. L. Company, Samoa, California.

NEWMAN, YALE.—Please write or return home, as you are very much needed in New York. Eve, care of this magazine.

TROTH, CHARLES, of Medford, New Jersey.—He went to Howard, Montana, with his uncle, James French, and was last heard of in Helena, Montana, in 1889. Any one having any news will kindly write to William L. Troth, Swedesboro, New Jersey.

FRENCH, OWEN and **BEN.**—They are fifty-five and fifty-seven years of age respectively, and were last heard of in 1911. Ben went to Alaska, and Owen went to Seattle, Washington, from Leavenworth, Washington, and later was seen in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Any one knowing their present address will kindly write to Eleanor Reisch, Box 520, Romulus, Michigan.

CLARENCE.—When you return to the city please do not come home, as grandfather will have you arrested. If you write me, please address all your mail in care of Mrs. Ford, 3150 Fox Street. Grandmother.

WESTERLIND or **WESTERLINDER.**—Information is wanted regarding the descendants of this family, formerly located at Falskoping, Sweden. Write to E. F. Wesley, Oconto Falls, Wisconsin.

RAY, WILLIAM L.—He was connected with the Ford plant in Detroit, Michigan, in 1919. Please let me know if you are married, and if you still think of the past. M. M. B., care of this magazine.

LOY, ANGLE, or any of my old pals of the Tank Corps. Please write to Fred Karsten, care of B. M. S., Hot Springs, South Dakota.

JOHNSON, ERNEST.—He was in New Hampshire five years ago. He is six feet in height, forty-nine years of age, has light hair, one blue and one black eye, and weighs two hundred pounds. Please write to your sister, who promises to keep your address a secret. Any one having any news will kindly communicate with Mrs. Ida Thurston, Woodbury, Vermont.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from any of the boys who served with me in the Sixty-second Company, United States Marine Corps, at Cape Haitien, Haiti, during the year 1921 and part of 1922. Steve J. Kovack, R. F. D. 2, Boydswile, Bridgeport, Ohio.

JOHNSON, LUTHER.—He was living in Kansas City, Missouri, some time ago. Your old pal, Ed, is very anxious to hear from you at the same address.

ISABEL.—I saw Ruth's pictures, and I think they are lovely. If you will send me your address I promise to keep it a secret, and I will try to see you. Please write soon. Trudy.

MANGAN, THOMAS.—He left his home in Victory Mills, New York, thirty-nine years ago, and was last heard of in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is now sixty-two years of age, and is a bridge builder by trade. His sister would like to find him, and will appreciate information of his present whereabouts. Mrs. Nova Heath, 348 Palisade Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey.

BARRAL, Mrs. EUGENE.—Her home is in Montreal, Canada. Her husband is a street-car conductor. Her mother is worried over her absence, and would welcome any helpful news. Mrs. E. Miner, Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, Canada.

BROWN, ARCHIE.—He formerly came from Ouray, Colorado. His wife's name is Eva, and they had two daughters, and a son, Bernice, Kathleen, and Carl. Please send all information to Mrs. Bernice Brown Nodine, care of the Bruhno Barber Shop, 1312 Sixteenth Street, Denver, Colorado.

EDWARD, Mrs. SAMUEL.—She formerly lived at Littleton, Colorado, but was last heard of in Denver, Colorado. Her maiden name was Frances Wasson. Any information concerning her will be appreciated, as she is needed to settle her father's estate. Please write to Mrs. A. S. Trone, Box 73, Sloan, Iowa.

POTTER, WILEY H., Jr.—He was in the United States Marine Corps, and came to New York City in August, 1923, on a leave of absence. Please write at once. Ham, Box 2061, Atlanta.

BEHM, CHARLES R.—He is a professional boxer, and goes by the name of Jack Welda. An old friend would like to find him, and will welcome information of his present whereabouts. Sam Leivy, 112 St. Saginaw, Pontiac, Michigan.

ATTENTION.—Will all the marines stationed at the United States naval ordnance plant during 1922 please write to O. L., Box 166, Calhoun, Missouri.

GRIMES, A. C.—He is seventy years of age, five feet nine inches in height, and was seen in Caldwell, Idaho, in 1903. His son would like to find him, and will appreciate his present address. B. A. Grimes, Box 332, Lehigh, Iowa.

A. E. C.—I received your letter. Please send me your name and address, so that I will be able to answer. You are always welcome. Ruth.

STUA, JOE, of Kankakee, Illinois.—He served in the Twelfth Cavalry during the World War. Please write to your old pal, Jim, care of this magaine.

MacDONALD, ROBERT.—Your brother, Harry, who lives in Syracuse, New York, wishes to hear from you, as he has important news for you. E. H. A., care of this magazine.

WILSON, LEONARD E.—He is five feet eight inches in height, has dark-brown eyes and hair, and weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. He was in Wellington, Texas, on April 11, 1924, but later went to New Mexico to work in the oil fields. His sister is eager to get in touch with him, as his mother is ill, and he is needed at home. Miriam Wilson, 1589 Greenbrier Street, Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

MARTIN, EWELL.—I would like to get in touch with any of the buddies who served with Ewell Martin, who was first sergeant in Company H, Fourteenth Infantry, in Seattle, Washington. James E. H., care of this magazine.

B. C.—Do you remember ninety-nine? I would like to get in touch with you concerning the divorce. Please write to me at my home address. F.

FRY or **SMITH.**—I would like to get in touch with a man named Fry, or any one who knows Clara Halinbeck Smith. Clara Halinbeck married a man by the name of Frank Smith, and they were living in New York City some time ago. Please write to Mrs. William Moulton, Box 36, Millis, Massachusetts.

BILL.—Please let me hear from you, as I have important news for you. Beth, Seattle, Washington.

BLAND, JOHN.—Please let me know where you are, as I am very anxious to see you. Rattlesnake Ike, West Palm Beach, Florida.

DAVIS, JOSEPH or **J. A.**—He was in the World War in Company M, One Hundred and Sixty-seventh Infantry. Please write, as there is news awaiting you. T. H. M., care of this magazine.

SMITH, ROBERT JOSEPH.—He is twenty-three years of age, five feet four inches in height, has brown hair and gray eyes. He was on the U. S. S. "Ohio" in 1920, and later went to Lima, Ohio. Please write to an old friend, who is eager to see you. Trixie, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, BELL.—He was with his half sister, Annie Lochart, in Niles, Ohio. Your brother has been searching for you for some time, and will be glad to find you. James H. Davis, 3929 Third Street, Struthers, Ohio.

PATERSON, CARL.—He was last heard of in Omaha, Nebraska. He has one sister, Vera, and one brother, Ernest. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by John Sieg, 706 May Street, Marshalltown, Iowa.

McCULLERS, Mrs. E. V.—Any one living in Wellington, Alabama, who knows her address will confer a favor by writing to Ada King, 503 South Oak Street, Sparta, Illinois.

DUKE, C. W., of Richmond, Virginia.—In December, 1923, he wired the secretary of his lodge, the "Odd Fellows," that he was ill in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Any one knowing his present address will kindly communicate with J. Cal Williams, care of Allen and Ginter Branch, Richmond, Virginia.

TAYLOR, HANEL or **HARREL.**—He is thirty-two years of age, five feet eight inches in height, has light hair, blue eyes, and weighs one hundred and forty-five pounds. In May, 1917, he was living at 217 North Eighteenth Street, Kansas City, Kansas. Any one knowing his whereabouts will kindly inform M. D. Taylor, Forest City, North Carolina.

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TAYLOR, MATT, SHORT.—I would like to hear from the relatives of Mrs. Emma Taylor, George S. Matt, and Cassian Short, of Kentucky. Please send all news to Mrs. E. Taylor, 837 Birch Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

VOILES, ED.—I have not heard from you yet. If you do not want to see or hear from an old friend, who is willing to help you in every possible way, please let me know, and I will not bother you any longer. I am located for the winter in a booming oil town, and have excellent prospects for both of us. Please wire or write at once. Musical Director, Empress Theater, Fort Collins, Colorado.

ALDRIDGE, CLYDE.—I would like to get in touch with my parents and relatives. I am six feet in height, have light-brown curly hair, hazel blue eyes, and weigh one hundred and eighty-five pounds. When I was a child I was placed in an orphans' home in Evanston, Illinois. Any one having any information will confer a favor by communicating with Clyde Aldridge, 43 Henry Street, Binghamton, New York.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from any of the boys that were in the *Fourteenth Infantry at Yuma, Arizona,* in 1916 and 1917, and also those that were transferred to the Forty-fourth Infantry at Vancouver Barracks, or Camp Lewis or Presidio of San Francisco, California. Roy Reynolds, care of J. W. Myers, Condon, Oregon.

WALKER, FRED.—He was in Montreal, Canada. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly communicate with Cecil F. Walker, Box 2, Farmville, Virginia.

PECK, Mrs. JENNIE J. and ARTHUR.—They were living at 3033 Cottage Grove Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, in 1890. Please notify Jean Kopfs, Bloomington, Illinois.

ATTENTION.—I would like to get in touch with my parents, who lived in Montana, Missouri, or Kentucky. When I was a child I was placed in an orphans' home, and later I was adopted by a family named Mowfields, of St. Louis, Missouri. I have dark hair, blue eyes, a fair complexion, and weigh one hundred and eighty-one pounds. Please send all helpful information to Mrs. Mary Gildewell, 837 Birch Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

WISE, Mrs. GEORGE L. and SIDEL, Mrs. RUTH.—Mrs. Wise is forty-five years of age. Mrs. Sidel is thirty years of age, and has a girl fifteen years old. They formerly lived in Portland, Oregon, but were last heard of in Los Angeles, California. Any one having any information will kindly communicate with Art Anderson, Box 206, Springview, Nebraska.

JACOBS, HENRY.—He was last heard of in Clavashome, Alberta, Canada. Any one knowing his whereabouts will kindly write to N. M. Kelley, 553 North Catalina, Pasadena, California.

ROSS, ALBERT WILLIAM.—Please write to an old friend, who is anxious to see you. Corporal R. V. Lockwood, Division Air Service, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

HARPER, NOVICE.—He was living at 538 West Fiftieth Street, in Los Angeles, California. He is twelve years of age, and was going to school in March, 1924. Please write to N. Harper, 129 South L Street, Tulare, California.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from my buddies who were in Troop B, Fifth United States Cavalry, stationed at Hollandus Ranch, Valentine, Texas, between 1920 and 1921, and were discharged at Marfa, Texas, on August 13, 1921. Please communicate with Richard W. Swanson, Box 95, Florham Park, New Jersey.

PHILLIPS, WILLIAM EARL.—He left his home seventeen years ago, and went to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and is now supposed to be in Canada. He is thirty-six years of age, five feet eight inches in height, has round shoulders, a birthmark on the left side of his neck, and an Indian tattooed on his left arm. Please notify Mrs. W. G. Phillips, Rockwood, Tennessee.

GERALD, M.—Your accounts have been taken care of, including the one at Cleveland, Ohio, and we are anxious to hear from you. Please write at once. Your mother, Mrs. G. W. C., Columbus, Ohio.

FULLER, JACK E. and BUDDIE.—Your folks are ill and need you. Only they know that you are gone, so there is no need for worry. We have all papers ready for your freedom, and it will never again be as easy for you as it is right now. Please let us help you, as we love and trust you. Mother.

DIVERS, GEORGE.—He is *five feet nine inches* in height, has black hair, a light complexion, a scar over one eye and on the right leg. His home is in Roanoke, Virginia, and he is a cook by trade. Your pal of the oil fields, in Little Rock, Arkansas, is eager to get in touch with you. G. W. B. —— G. S.

LARUE, JOE.—I answered your letter, and am anxious to know how things are. Bull Russell, Box 251, Station B, Montreal, Canada.

STRONG, HENRY OTTO.—He was at Tamarack, Minnesota, in 1903. He is forty-three years of age, six feet four inches in height, has black hair and blue eyes. Any one knowing his whereabouts will kindly notify Harry Boket, R. F. D. 1, Deary, Idaho.

WAIT, HENRY E.—He is thirty-five years of age, six feet in height, has black hair and eyes, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. He was in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the early part of 1914. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated. P. B. Wait, 737 Fifth Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

WILSON, V. E.—He is a member of the Gamma Rho Chapter of the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity in Missouri. He tramped from Bordeaux to Marseilles, France, in 1923, but was last heard of in Missoula, Montana. He is a newspaper man. Please write to your old friend, who was planning to go with you to Buenos Aires, South America. Oland D. Russell, New York "Evening Post," Sports' Department, Vesey Street, New York City.

KIDD, CHARLES.—He was in San Francisco, California, seventeen years ago. He has black hair, dark eyes, and was living in Clinton, Michigan, at the time of his wife's death. His daughter would like to hear from him, and would welcome his present whereabouts. Juanita Marie Kidd, 6009 Compton Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

FUEL.—I would like to hear from any of the relatives of Z. T. Fuel, who was born in Indiana in 1849. After marriage he traveled South, to Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and other States. He had several brothers and three sisters. His son is eager to hear from his relatives. Charles O. Fuel, Dawson, Texas.

NORMA.—The body of Dickie Berkley, musician and playwright, who died of a fractured skull in Louisville, Kentucky, arrived in Seattle, Washington, and was placed in the Marsans Mausoleum. Miss Berkley was a graduate of the University of Washington, and the only heir of Paul V. Marsans, of Alaska and Seattle. Orabell, V. M., Puritan Apartments, Louisville, Kentucky.

PATTERSON, HERBERT.—He is twenty-eight years of age, has dark eyes, brown hair, and is a plumber or engineer by trade. He formerly lived in Omaha, Nebraska, but was last heard of in California. Please write, as affairs at home are serious. If you are still ignorant of the outcome of Meme, send word at once, although you have forfeited all right to see her. Justice, care of this magazine.

PIERCE, CLAUDE.—She is thirty years of age, short and plump, and has black hair and eyes. Any one knowing her address will kindly communicate with her stepdaughter, Babe, care of this magazine.

CHRISTMAN, Mrs. NORA.—She was working out on a ranch in Trinidad, Colorado, in 1909. Her maiden name was Linmark, and she lived in Cranfills Gap, Texas. Her present address is requested by her brother, John E. Rue, 236 Broadway Street, Butte, Montana.

HENDERSON, ELENORA.—She was in Baltimore, Maryland, some time ago. Any one knowing her whereabouts will confer a favor by communicating with Don, care of this magazine.

WALLACE, E. C.—You are free to do as you please, as long as you write to us. Your mother has been seriously ill, because of your absence, and begs you to let her know where you are living. Send all mail to the same address. E. C.

POWELL or PAULIE or JOSEPH.—He had three sisters—Annie, Eva, and Mary. In 1903 he was living in Canterbury Street, South Worcester, Massachusetts. Please write to Mrs. Ernest Wiare, General Delivery, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada.

PIERCE, CLAUDE.—Please let me know where Boy and Lucille Blossom are living, and whether L.'s mother is married again. B. K. said that they were in Iowa, but I cannot find them. I have a girl of my own, but I hate to think that Lucille may be in need. Babe, care of this magazine.

TOWERS, HAROLD L.—He lived in Akron, Cleveland, Youngstown, Ohio, and in Shreveport, Louisiana, but was last heard of in Euclid, Ohio, in the spring of 1924. Any one knowing his whereabouts will kindly write to his only son, who has important news for him. Robert E. Towers, 89 Academy Street, Chicopee, Massachusetts.

PARYPEK, WALTER and MAX.—They are twenty-eight and twenty-six years of age respectively. Walter left home in 1913, and was last seen in Ohio, while Max left home in 1914. Any information will be greatly appreciated. Mary Parypek, R. F. D. 3, Box 103, Hamburg, New York.

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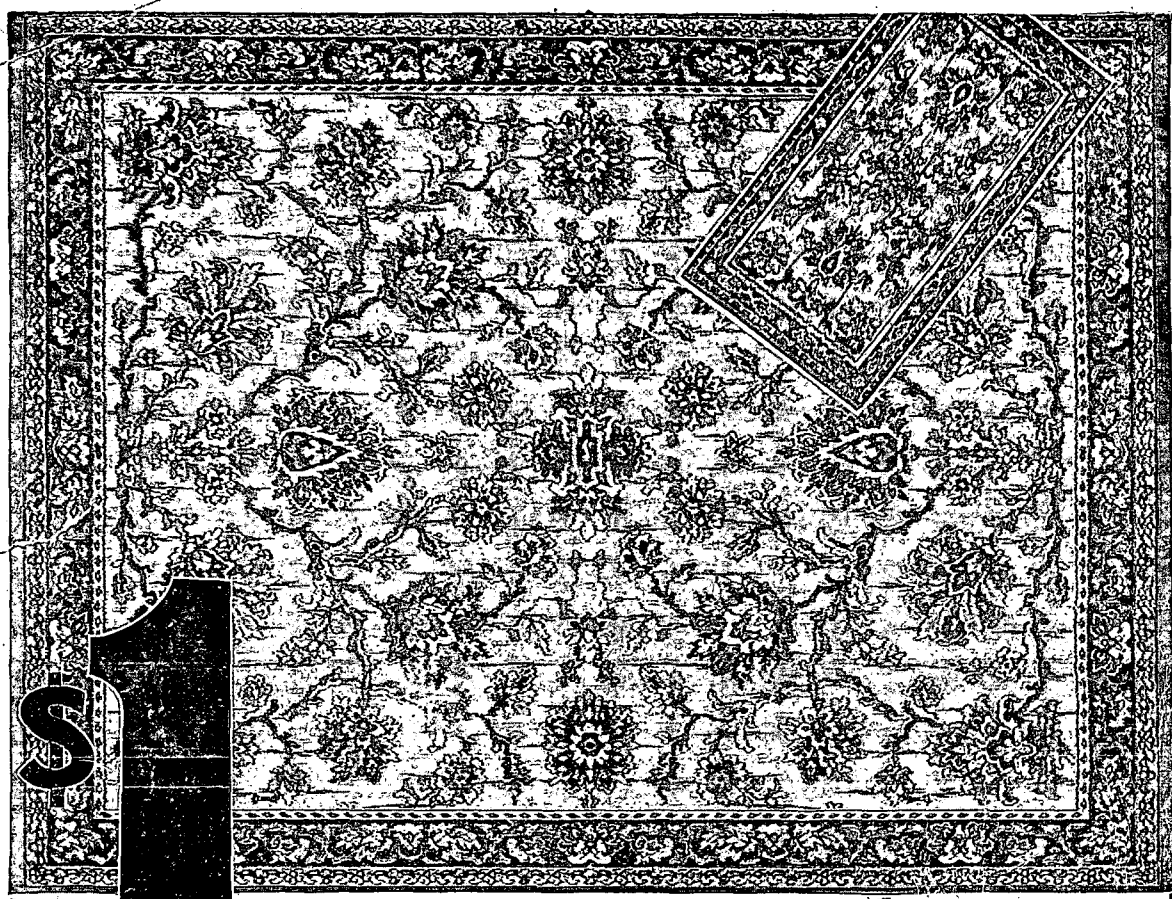

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THIS is the rug that is exactly right for the best room in a cheerful, well-kept, happy, refined home. It comes in full room size only, 9 x 12 ft. It is a Velvet Rug, made of closely woven high quality worsted yarns, with a heavy back. It is woven in one piece, without a single seam. Will give excellent service and years of wear. Colors are absolutely fast and will not fade. The rich shades of blue, tan, rose and taupe blend perfectly with the warm tan background. To fully appreciate the quality, beauty and rich coloring of this rug you must see it on your own floor. And this you can do entirely at my risk. Send the coupon and $1 and the rug will soon be on its way to you. Use it for 30 Days as if it were your own. No matter how much you have used it, you can return it, if you are not thoroughly pleased. Your first payment and all transportation charges will be refunded, the trial will not cost you a penny. This is my fair, square, Money Back Bond that makes the Rug its own salesman; that makes it prove its worth in your own home. **Order No. SA5085. Special Sale Price $39.95. Terms: $1 with order, $3 Monthly. Hearth Rug to Match. Absolutely Free, if you act promptly.**

HERE IS A RICH LOOKING PERSIAN DESIGN VELVET RUG OF UNUSUAL CHARM AND BEAUTY. A rug of cozy warmth; aristocratic in appearance, excellent in quality. A rug you will be both glad and proud to own. In its splendid design and color harmony this rug is a reproduction of a costly oriental rug. So, it will meet with the approval of the most exacting, the most discriminating buyer.

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Hearth Rug Free!

This 27 x 52 inch Persian Design Velvet Hearth Rug is of the same quality, the same pattern and the same colorings as the 9x12 ft. room size rug described on this page. It matches the big rug exactly. When used in the same room, the two will harmonize perfectly. It does not cost you a single penny. To get the Free Hearth Rug you must order promptly. Both rugs will be sent together.

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Easy Monthly Payments

Nathaniel Spear
President

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Send me at once the 9x12 ft. Velvet Rug and Free Hearth Rug to match as described above. Enclosed is $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of 30 days' trial I decide to keep it, I will send you $3.00 monthly. Order No. SA5085. Price $39.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. Send me your Big Free Catalog also.

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